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The 27th Legislature
First Session

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The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature

First Session

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 Mitzel, Len, Cypress-Medicine Hat, Deputy Chair of Committees

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[Errata, if any, appear inside back cover]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Wednesday, May 7, 2008

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon, and welcome.

Let us pray. We give thanks for Your abundant blessings to our province and to ourselves. We ask for Your guidance with our deliberations in our Chamber and the will to follow them. Amen.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Premier.

Mr. Stevens: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise this afternoon to introduce to you and through you to other members of the Assembly His Excellency Declan Kelly, ambassador of Ireland, and his wife, Mrs. Anne Kelly. They are seated in the Speaker's gallery. I was pleased to host a lunch at Government House earlier today for the ambassador, who is visiting Alberta for the second time but his first official visit. His first visit was personal, back in the '80s, when he came to Canada. He took his wife and three boys in a small motorhome across our land, through the prairies, on the condition that he had to drive all of the way because his wife was not prepared to drive that thing. Anyway, they had a wonderful time. They saw Alberta. They saw the Banff-Jasper highway. The Kellys are very happy to be back in Alberta today.

Mr. Speaker, Ireland has been a world leader in the development of advanced industries and has shown tremendous leadership in transforming to a knowledge-based economy. Ireland ranks as Alberta's seventh largest trading partner from Europe, and we believe there's tremendous opportunity to strengthen this relationship. Something I did not know but that I'm sure all who are of Irish heritage do know is that there are more than 500,000 Albertans who are of Irish heritage.

I would ask the ambassador and his wife and the balance of the Irish contingent to stand at this time, and I would ask our colleagues in the Assembly to give them the traditional warm welcome.

Thank you.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Mr. Stelmach: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have three introductions today. The first group, seated in the members' gallery, are 35 outstanding high school students from across Alberta. These students are all leaders in their schools and are here taking part in the Forum for Young Albertans. The forum is celebrating its 30th anniversary. These students are going to have a weeklong insight into the workings of our provincial government. I had the distinct pleasure of meeting all of them earlier this week. We had an excellent discussion, and I can assure you that with the interest these young people showed, our future in this province is in great hands. They are accompanied today by program assistants Ms Tanya Hrehirchuk, Ms Anne Marie Harmsen, Mr. Arthur Lee, Ms Carissa Millwater, and Mr. Devin Frobbs. I would ask them all to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, my second group are visitors from my hometown of

Andrew, Alberta, which happens to be gaining some fame the last two weeks at least. They're all individuals who contribute greatly to their family, church, and community. Very quickly, there are 16 in total, all in the members' gallery: Steve and Grace Blashko, Jim and Sylvia Ostapowich, John and Connie Newgard, Metro and Anelia Topolnisky – Metro was my grade 8 teacher; he's also the only phys ed instructor who could walk around the whole gymnasium on his hands – Nick and Susan Newchuk, Mrs. Laura Melnyk, Jerry and Helen Tymchyshyn, Sonia Zinnick, Mr. Harry Zukiwsky, and Mrs. Anne Matiaszow. I would ask them all to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The third group are constituents from the beautiful community of Lamont-Andrew. They include the former mayor, Mr. Fred Pewarchuk, and his wife, Lil, and good friends and my cousins – both families came on the same ship in 1898 to the same place, where we're still picking the most rocks – Borden and Sophie Koroluk. Again, great contributors to the community, and I'm very, very proud to introduce them to our House. I'd ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of our Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Hayden: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to all members a group from Drumheller, in the badlands, from the Greentree school, 60 members in all. I won't introduce them all individually, but I will introduce the teachers and group leaders that are with them: teachers Mrs. Alison Ostergard, Mrs. Corinne Gerling, Mrs. Kirsten Sutcliffe, Ms Christine Holden and parents and helpers Mrs. Audrey De Bona, Mrs. Isabel Redding, Mr. David Dunlop, Mrs. Carol Lecuyer, Mrs. Norma Davies, Mr. Dieter Borst, Mr. Brian Robinson, and Mr. Al Molzan. If they would stand, please join me in giving them the traditional Assembly welcome.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Mr. Doerksen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure this afternoon to rise and introduce to you and through you to the members of this House 20 grades 5 and 6 students from the Hussar school. They are accompanied today by teachers Mrs. Linda Moczulski and Mrs. Frances Williams and parents Mrs. Jackie Fraser and Mrs. Stacey Fraser. They're seated in both the members' and the public galleries this afternoon. I'd ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this House.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Prins: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for me to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly a group called the CCAF fellows. The CCAF is known as the Canadian Comprehensive Auditing Foundation. These people are participants in a nine-month international fellowship program based in Ottawa, Ontario. They're visiting us today from various parts of the world as part of a tour of western Canada. The fellowship program is a collaboration between the office of the Auditor General of Canada, the CCAF, and the Auditor General of Quebec. The experience is designed to help them address auditing issues in their home environment.

Joining us today from Benin is Alain Kpessoton; from Ghana, Henry Missah; from Ghana, Yaw Sifah; from Guyana, Audrey Badley; from Kenya, Benson Kariuki; from Mali, Aly Diallo; and from Saint Lucia, Averil James. They are accompanied today by their hosts, Ms Donna Bigelow, program coordinator, international

affairs, office of the Auditor General of Canada; Mrs. Caroline Jorgensen, manager for international business at the CCAF in Ottawa; Mr. Adriel Gionet, director of international relations, office of the Auditor General of Canada; and Ms Lori Trudgeon, communications co-ordinator, office of the Auditor General of Alberta. They are seated in your gallery, Mr. Speaker, and I would ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

1:40

Mr. Sandhu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you to the Assembly three guests sitting in your gallery today. First of all, I am proud to say that my dad, Ranjit Singh Sandhu, is here to watch question period for the first time. My dad is a very active man at age 76. My mom passed away three years ago. My dad always asks me when my colleagues and I will visit India. Today he asked me: what colour turban should I wear? I said that light blue is our party colour. So he did. Thank you. I would like to ask my father to rise at this time to receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Secondly, two very special friends of mine, Mr. Gurmail Singh Kailay and Ajaib Singh Mann, are seated with my father in your gallery. Both of these gentlemen have lived in Edmonton for 25 years. They always contribute to fundraising, food banks, blood donations, and any other worthwhile cause. They are always more than ready to help out community groups in any way they can. I would like to ask these two friends of mine to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Aboriginal Relations.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed a great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly several members from the Métis Settlements General Council. As members here would all know, this group is very dedicated to working hard for the citizens living on our eight Métis settlements, and it was an honour for me to meet with them this morning. I'll introduce them one at a time. I would ask that they each rise and remain standing until all have been presented: Gerald Cunningham, president; Allan Wells, vice-president; Susan Cardinal Lamouche, secretary; Denise White, treasurer; Shelley Wegner, government relations; Ryck Chalifoux, Fishing Lake settlement; Hector Lamouche, Gift Lake settlement; Bruce Gordon, Buffalo Lake settlement; Louis Haggerty, East Prairie settlement; Archie Collins, Elizabeth settlement; Greg Calliou, Paddle Prairie settlement. I hope Raymond Carifelle, Peavine settlement, also made it. Please join me in welcoming these very special members of our council.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the Members of the Legislative Assembly Mr. Bill Wister, who is the executive lead of the Safe Communities Secretariat. The Solicitor General and I had a very successful meeting this morning with the Alberta Association of Chiefs of Police – Edmonton police chief Mike Boyd, Calgary police chief Rick Hanson, and RCMP deputy commissioner Rod Knecht – where we were able to hear a very good presentation from Mr. Wister on the first steps that the safe communities task force has

been able to undertake in implementing the recommendations of the safe communities task force report of last November. As executive lead Bill will co-ordinate with our partner ministries, municipalities, and community groups to implement meaningful, long-term crime prevention and reduction strategies and to ensure Alberta is a safe and secure place to live. I would ask Mr. Wister to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Seniors and Community Supports.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly a good friend of mine, a constituent of Red Deer-North, who helped me throughout my campaign. He's a teacher at Sylvan Lake, a very active community volunteer, and a good friend. He's in the members' gallery. I would ask Kevin Pizzey to stand and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two introductions today. I rise with great pride to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly my daughter, Bridget Mearns, who's also known as Bridget Jr. She has been my executive assistant and the constituency manager for Lethbridge-East for the past three years. She brought years of public experience in addition to her experience in the world of finance and public relations. In fact, she served in the Lethbridge-East constituency office when the late hon. Dick Johnston was our MLA and for our MP, Blaine Thacker, in Ottawa. She ensured that in the office she remained nonpartisan. The constituents of Lethbridge-East have been well served. She went way beyond what was expected of her to solve their problems. However, her biggest job has always been to babysit this MLA. We were a great team, Bridget Jr. and Bridget Sr., or we were just the Bridgets. I will miss her love and support, and I would ask that she stand and be recognized by this House.

My second introduction, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you to the Legislature Moira Watson, a bright young woman who is now the manager of the Lethbridge-East constituency office. She has a degree in anthropology from the University of Lethbridge and brings a broad range of experience in administration, project management, and public relations. Moira has taught kindergarten in Malaysia, travelled in India, and built houses in Nicaragua. She is here for the LAO orientation sessions for constituency staff and through Bridget Jr. has been meeting with the ministry and department contacts that she will be working with. I have every confidence that the constituents of Lethbridge-East will continue to be well served. I would ask her now to rise and be welcomed by the House.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly my executive assistant, a real treasure for the Calgary-Varsity constituency, and I'll have her stand in a moment. My new duties require me to be the caucus whip, and I refer to myself in internal messaging as Dream Whip. The Member for Lethbridge-East, the deputy whip, is known as Cool Whip. But I'd like to introduce Linda Pushor, the real whip. Linda, please stand and receive the congratulations of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Well, there certainly is love in the air today.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Random Dog Searches

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Approximately two weeks ago the Supreme Court of Canada made a ruling that has the potential to restrict our progress in the battle against drugs in our schools and other public places. The ruling states that if a drug-sniffing dog randomly identifies an individual carrying drugs, that person may not be prosecuted unless there are other reasons for the police to reasonably suspect that the individual is indeed carrying drugs. In other words, if a random canine search is conducted in a bus depot or in a school and that search turns up 100 kilograms of cocaine, the police may still be allowed to seize the drugs, but they would be unable to use the seized substances as evidence in prosecuting the would-be trafficker.

Mr. Speaker, hundreds of Albertans and other Canadians have been protected by canine units around the country working efficiently to curb drug trafficking. It is my belief that drug-detection dogs alerting police to the presence of drugs in a person's luggage or backpack is no different than anti-theft alarms alerting police to would-be shoplifters with merchandise hidden in their pockets as they attempt to leave the store.

Mr. Speaker, it is time to take the handcuffs off our law enforcement officials, who are working to keep our communities and schools safe, and slap those handcuffs instead on the criminals who would do us harm. Fortunately, the Supreme Court appears to have left the door open for the federal government to resolve this issue if they are willing to enact specific legislation to address the newly formed void in the law.

I would hope that every member of this House would join me in strongly encouraging the federal government to take whatever steps are necessary to ensure that our good men and women in uniform are not deprived of making effective use of canine units in the battle on drugs in our communities and in our schools.

Thank you.

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: First Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Reclamation of Oil Sands Tailings Ponds

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Sydney tar ponds in Nova Scotia are one kilometre long and consist of 700,000 tonnes of coal-based waste and sludge. The estimated cleanup costs for these ponds are \$800 million or higher. Here in Alberta we have over 50 square kilometres of toxic tailings ponds. My question is to the Minister of Environment. How much is it going to cost to clean up the oil sands tailings ponds?

1:50

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, it's very clear that the cost of reclamation is borne by the company that created the tailings pond in the first place. But I also want to be clear that the comparison of the Nova Scotia situation to the Alberta situation is absurd. There they were dealing with a situation where there was not containment, where there was not a regulated environment. Here it's exactly the opposite.

Dr. Taft: Given that this minister said yesterday that these ponds would be cleaned up "at an appropriate time," could the minister tell us when that will be?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, part of the operating authority that is granted to the developers has a reclamation plan in place. The reclamation of tailings ponds and other mining activity that is associated with oil sands is done according to a reclamation plan that is filed by each of the various developments, so the rate of reclamation will vary from project to project.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, since the scale of risk – and that's what this is about – of oil sands tailings ponds is in the same league as the Love Canal or the *Exxon Valdez* or the Sydney tar ponds, why is this minister sitting back and relying on self-policing by oil companies to manage and clean up these toxic ponds?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, that's simply not an accurate statement. There are very rigid and strict requirements that these developments are required to follow. It is not self-policing. As a matter of fact, reclamation certificates are only issued after it has been determined by SRD, by Alberta Environment that, in fact, the development has been restored to a predevelopment status.

Environmental Protection Security Fund

Dr. Taft: The environmental protection security fund of this government is supposed to be our guarantee as Albertans to ensure satisfactory land reclamation in Alberta. It's like a damage deposit for industry. This fund covers industries like coal, oil sands, sand and gravel operations. The 2006-07 annual report indicates that for all land reclamation a total of \$675 million is in the fund. Again to the Minister of Environment: is the minister satisfied that this is enough to ensure full reclamation of our land from relevant industry activity in Alberta?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, the total as of 2008, two years later, is now \$875 million. The answer to the question is yes. There is an appropriate mechanism in place to ensure that reclamation is paid for by the developer. These funds are an additional insurance policy, so to speak, that are returned to the developer after the reclamation is complete, whether or not they were sufficient to cover the total costs.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you. Well, a total amount of about 83 and a half million dollars is held in this fund for reclamation of the Aurora mine site, including the tailings ponds. Given that the Wabamun spill cleanup alone cost \$125 million, how can this minister assure Albertans that \$83 million is sufficient to reclaim this entire site?

Mr. Renner: Again, Mr. Speaker, the member is confusing two separate issues. One deals with a contained vessel that deals with industrial waste fluids; the other deals with an environmental disaster and pollution. In the case of pollution in an uncontained environment the costs, obviously, are higher, and in that case the polluter pays. In the case of the tailings ponds the fact of the matter is that the costs of reclamation are the responsibility of the holder of the assets, but they certainly would not be in the same magnitude as an uncontrolled environmental disaster.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: in the 30-some years that oil sands mines have been operating in Alberta, can the minister tell us how many reclamation certificates have been issued?

Mr. Renner: One, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Security of Oil Sands Tailings Ponds

Mr. Hehr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With the recent attention on the oil sands and the tailings ponds a serious question of how to secure these incredibly toxic lakes has arisen. The government commissioned a threat assessment on the oil sands last November which concluded that these facilities are extremely vulnerable, but on the advice of the top sheriff, who felt the report was based on speculation, not fact, the report was shelved. To the Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security. The head of your security and intelligence support team has dismissed the recommendations of this assessment without any real explanation. Can the minister provide details to this House as to why this report has been dismissed?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The report in question certainly was not commissioned by my ministry and was really more a request for service than it was a security report. The particular individuals did not even get security clearance, so they weren't even aware of the programs that we have in place up there.

Mr. Hehr: To the same minister: does the minister actually believe that the 12 sheriffs who are responsible for counterterrorism in Alberta are enough to protect the oil sands projects? What specialized training do the members of ASSIST have in complex counterterrorism intelligence?

Mr. Lindsay: Mr. Speaker, the sheriffs who are looking after our counterterrorism and crisis management plan work in conjunction with not only the provincial RCMP but the federal RCMP and international bodies. They are very well trained, and they are very well connected. That's why Albertans are in a position today where security is a very low risk.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Hehr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If the tailings ponds were breached and poured into the Athabasca River, the environmental implications would be vast. Does the minister seriously believe that this small team of sheriffs is a sufficient deterrent to this threat of terrorism?

Mr. Lindsay: Mr. Speaker, I believe I've already answered that. We believe that the team that we have in place to look after security in this province is very adequate, in fact is one of the best in the country.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, followed by the hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, just to follow along in the same line of questioning, a group of consultants prepared a report for the provincial government warning that the security of the tailings ponds is a major terrorist threat. The consultants are warning that attackers using an aircraft could try to breach the dams and send the tailings into the Athabasca River, causing an environmental catastrophe of the first order. The government has rejected these findings, saying that oil sands companies are taking action to protect their facilities. To the Premier: what confidence can Albertans place in this government to keep terrorists away from tailings ponds when they can't keep away even a few ducks?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, as the minister indicated, the province has a very complex, high-tech system of protecting the most vulnerable infrastructure that may be open to any kind of terrorist threat. Most of the terrorist threat is, of course, at our pipelines and those refineries closer to cities, and there has been a lot of money invested. In fact, in a visit recently from our neighbours to the south they were very pleasantly surprised at what infrastructure we have in place to protect Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, will the Premier admit that his government's failure to insist on dry tailings puts Alberta at an even greater risk of environmental catastrophe whether or not it's terrorism or simply by accident?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, we have the strictest legislation in place in the country of Canada when it comes to air and water. We'll continue to be very vigilant. For this particular incident that has caught so much attention, at least from the opposition, I said that we'll have a full inquiry, investigation. As I said before, if there were any errors committed by whoever we issued the permit to, we will bring those people forward. We have very strict fines in place as well. This isn't a funny matter. This is serious, and we take it seriously. If there's any wrongdoing, all Albertans will be made very well aware of what happened at that site.

2:00

Mr. Mason: Well, it's great that the Premier is closing the barn door now that the horses are out, but I want to ask the Premier whether or not he will do the environmentally responsible thing and act to clean up the Athabasca tailings ponds with no further delay.

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, there is a lot of research and innovation being put in place in terms of the tailings ponds. There are a number of good ideas. The Energy Research Institute is investing considerable money together with the oil industry. I'm looking forward to more information coming out of further research. We will put that research to work. We have a lot of work to do in the province of Alberta because we have greenhouse gas issues that we're leading the country of Canada in, and we're going to take a leadership role in this area as well.

Métis Settlements Funding

Mrs. Leskiw: Mr. Speaker, earlier this morning I met the representatives from two Métis settlement councils in my constituency, Elizabeth and Fishing Lake. Issues of great importance to them include funding, availability of basic services, economic develop-

ment opportunities, and so on. However, they stressed that this year's budget allocation of \$7 million spread over eight settlements just isn't sufficient. To the Minister of Aboriginal Relations: why is your ministry providing only \$7 million to our eight Métis settlements for this year?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, the \$7 million that has been allocated in this year's budget for the eight Métis settlements is really funding during this interim year as we work toward a long-term funding arrangement that will accommodate the needs as expressed. Seven million dollars is what we were allocated, and I was happy to pass it along. I'm hoping that they will use it to their good benefit.

Mrs. Leskiw: To the same minister: given that the statutory funding for the Métis settlements ended in 2007, why is it taking so long for your department to conclude a new long-term funding arrangement?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, we're working as fast as we can on arriving at a new funding arrangement. In fact, this morning, when I met with the Métis Settlements General Council, we talked about the issues that are of great importance in that funding framework. Issues like local autonomy and economic self-sufficiency are complex issues that take some time to work through, but we are working with them as fast as we can, and I remain hopeful that we will have some resolution to this issue shortly.

Mrs. Leskiw: Again to the same minister: I appreciate that answer, but we and they want to know when you expect to have that agreement in place and how you intend to achieve that goal.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I hope we'll have it in place just as soon as possible. This morning we talked about the steering committee that would be necessary, comprised of Métis Settlements General Council members, comprised of some of our own folks, who will work hard together to arrive at the game plan, as it were. Again, issues of self-governance and issues pertaining to local autonomy are complex matters that take some time to flesh out. Secondly, it's important that we attach specific performance measures to each of these particular aims. That, too, will take a little bit of time, but we are making good progress.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, followed by the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

Tobacco Reduction

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We've long had concerns on this side of the House about this government's relationship with the tobacco lobby, and after yesterday's exchange in question period, we still do. My questions are to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Has the minister of health ever in his capacity as an elected official of this Assembly been a guest of the National Smokeless Tobacco Company at the Calgary Stampede?

Mr. Liepert: Yes, Mr. Speaker, I have.

Mr. Taylor: How many times has the minister of health been a guest of the National Smokeless Tobacco Company?

Mr. Liepert: I think twice, and neither time did I chew.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll chew on that for a little.

Will the minister of health tell the House what that would have been worth; you know, the price of the ticket for admission to the grounds, the grandstand tickets, meals, drink tickets, that sort of thing?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, all MLAs periodically accept invitations to various events and functions, and I did not ask what the price of it was. If the hon. member wants to find out, I would suggest that maybe he contact the Calgary Stampede and ask them to price out what it might have cost.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Queen Elizabeth II Highway Repairs

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My constituents are very concerned with the state of the QE II highway north of Leduc. This is one of the busiest sections of highway in the province and is in need of much repair. Not only is this a concern for the summer but also for the winter months. My constituents are concerned. The highway needs to be repaved. My questions today are for the Minister of Transportation. What repairs, Mr. Minister, are planned for the QE II north of Leduc?

Mr. Ouellette: Well, Mr. Speaker, the province will be repaving the QE II south of Edmonton this summer. In fact, work has already begun on initial crack sealing. Starting at the end of May, the province will be repaving 17 kilometres of the southbound lanes and five kilometres of the northbound lanes between Ellerslie Road and highway 39. The cost of the project is just over \$21 million, and this is just one of the many road improvements that we have under way this year. In fact, the province is investing \$1.9 billion.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That will be very comforting to my constituents who travel this road on a daily basis.

Mr. Speaker, my first supplemental is for the same minister. In addition to the paving work that he just mentioned, are there other improvements on this stretch of highway that are planned for this summer?

Mr. Ouellette: Yes, Mr. Speaker. The province will be installing highway street lighting along the Queen E. II between the city of Edmonton and the airport access road. The installation of 230 lights on the shoulders of the highway will provide improved nighttime visibility and help improve safety for motorists on this busy section of highway. The cost of installation of the lighting work is just over \$2 million, and again this project is part of the record amount of investment Alberta is making in highway structure to make sure that our Albertans are safe.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Rogers: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can assure the minister that the lights will be greatly appreciated by my constituents.

My final supplemental. With the construction plan, Mr. Minister, that you've mentioned – the paving, the lighting – what is the province planning to do to minimize the disruption of the traffic, recognizing that there will be some impact on the traffic?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, my department works very hard to minimize the impact of highway construction for motorists. The crack sealing and repaving work on the QE II will be occurring at off-peak hours, and lane reductions will be limited to nighttime hours. The record amount of work under way this year means Alberta will have a very, very busy construction season. I'd like to remind all motorists to please slow down in construction zones, please be careful of all of the people working there, and remember that fines double in construction zones.

The Speaker: I'd like to remind the hon. minister that in my constituency people slow down because of the potholes in the roads.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, followed by the hon. Member for Strathcona.

Calgary Health Region Funding

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions are for the health minister. The ongoing health care crisis in the Calgary health region must be about people, not politics. The blaming has to stop, and we as a government must focus on ensuring safety of patients and staff. To the minister: will the minister put patients first and provide the necessary new funding for basic services in the Calgary health region?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, about a month ago we released a health action plan that did exactly that, put patients first. Over the next year we will be rolling out a number of initiatives in the health action plan, and we will be doing it in an orderly, thoughtful way because, unlike the Liberals, who have no plan, we have a plan.

Dr. Swann: Mr. Speaker, to the minister: since your government created this long-term crisis in Calgary by eliminating 1,500 beds, will you help with this crisis situation now in Calgary?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, we need to ensure that the numbers that the Calgary health region is talking about publicly are, in fact, ones that are audited. That's part of the process, that all health regions have to submit an audited financial plan by the end of June. We'll await that plan, and we'll take appropriate action.

2:10

Dr. Swann: That doesn't sound like putting patients first, Mr. Speaker. We've had 15 years of restructuring, reorganizing, privatizing, and now the minister is talking about more restructuring. Will the minister finally admit that this government simply does not know what to do with this profoundly damaged health care system?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, I'd suggest that the opposition doesn't know what to do. All they know is to complain. We have a plan. I have seen no plan from the opposition other than to throw more money at it. Spend money. Spend, spend, spend.

Camping in Parks and Protected Areas

Mr. Quest: Mr. Speaker, last year during the May long weekend there was a lot of damage done to public land in some areas of the province. Piles of garbage were left behind by campers. Trees were damaged. Trails sustained a lot of devastation. It was clear that some outdoors enthusiasts were in places that were off-limits. My questions are to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. What efforts is your department taking to prevent this from happening again?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for that question. I was there last May long weekend, and we didn't wait a year to fix the problem; we fixed it then. The very next month we brought in a new forest land-use zone, a FLUZ, for the Willow Creek area. With that new FLUZ in place we didn't have those kind of problems on the July and August long weekends. We'd already taken steps to fix the problem last year. This coming long weekend we'll have an enhanced presence not just in the Willow Creek area but up and down the entire eastern slopes.

Mr. Quest: My first supplemental is to the same minister. How are you making sure that you are effective at reaching Albertans?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, my department uses a combination of strategies to reach out to Albertans: planning, education, partnerships, and also enforcement. On the enforcement side I'm happy to report that we're increasing our guardian program this year by 20 per cent. Those are young students that work for the summer, helping on land and forest enforcement. We also use the respect the land program with respect to land, and this year we're doing something new. We have a Facebook page, a respect the land Facebook page that we're inviting Albertans to join, and they can keep aware of updates on that. Our message is: go camping, have fun, but act responsibly.

Mr. Quest: Mr. Speaker, my final question is to the Minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation. What's being done in provincial parks to control disruptive behaviour this May long weekend?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Ady: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our priority this May long weekend is to ensure that Alberta parks are safe and enjoyable places. There will be a temporary liquor ban – all members please take note – from noon on Thursday, May 15, until 6 p.m. on Monday, May 19, in seven of our parks: Aspen Beach, Wabamun Lake, Miquelon Lake, Dillberry Lake, Pigeon Lake, Cypress Hills, and Whitney Lakes provincial parks. Like other temporary liquor bans we've put in place since 2004, I'm confident this ban will be well received by campers and help keep our parks safe.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Traffic Noise on Anthony Henday Drive

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our caucus has received complaints from people living in Riverbend and Mill Woods here in Edmonton about the loud noise from traffic generated on the Anthony Henday Drive. These people cannot get a night's sleep because of the loud traffic noise from the Anthony Henday Drive. Now, my first question is to the Minister of Transportation. Does the government currently have any plans to put soundproofing on both sides of the Anthony Henday Drive?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, whenever we build new highways, new roads, we also always do the traffic impact study after to make sure that we meet the 65 decibels, which is what the bylaw is in Edmonton. We will check that area out. If we're over the 65 decibels, we will have to address the problem at that time.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can't understand why this wasn't done before, not after, to save the taxpayers a few dollars. [interjections] Now, the minister talks about a 65-decibel average over 24 hours, but the problem for these residents – and the hon. member may laugh, but it's his constituents. These residents are the individuals that are affected by the peaks of noise, and they cannot get sleep. What, again, are you going to do about it now?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, I just answered that question before. It's pretty hard for us to go out and do a test when it was an open field and there was no road there for traffic. Maybe that hon. member doesn't realize that. I did tell him that we will check the situation out. If there is a problem, we will address it.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Minister of Transportation: when the Whitemud freeway is there and you already know what kinds of noise levels are generated, and you already know what sound barriers need to be constructed, why did you not use that as a test before you built the Anthony Henday Drive? Use some common sense for once, please.

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, that's the one statement he's made that's right, that we agree on common sense, but I've never seen any on that side of the House before.

I will say that until we understand the full distances, what the traffic is going to be, and what the sounds are – at that time we'll address it because we care about all Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for St. Albert.

Funding for Contracted CFSA Agencies

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today representatives from agencies contracted in part by the ministry of children's services held a news conference to bring attention to the ongoing staffing crisis caused by a government that thinks \$11 an hour is enough to pay group home staff who treat the disabled. It turns out that the government's plan for front-line workers will result in wage increases of about 5 per cent, not enough to cover the 30 per cent between agency employees and direct government staff. To the minister of children's services: how does the minister expect agencies to provide vital, complex, specialized services to children most in need when paying employees starvation wages?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Tarchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm aware of the news conference this morning. I haven't heard all the details of the information that was shared, but I think there are a few important and critical points that I should make. The first is that we will never put the health or safety of a child at risk. If a contracted agency, for instance, cannot provide services to a child, they have an obligation to let us know, to let the authority that contracts with them know, and we will find other options.

Secondly, in my time as minister of this portfolio I've worked very closely with contracted agencies. Working through their issues is what brought the injection that we gave them in November, why we did give another \$11 million this budget, and announced the same for next year.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think they have let you know, and in fact they did that today.

Given that the shortchanging of staff is causing either the reduction or closure of numerous services such that almost 700 special-needs children and/or their families have been denied services in the last six months, how can the minister continue to defend her record when children who are most in need are being turned away as we speak?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Tarchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I don't know about the statistics that she's talking about, but I can tell you that I have always committed to working with the contracted agencies, and I'm going to continue. In fact, I've asked that in three weeks the CEOs of all of our CFSAs come to a full working day with 20 representatives from the organization that you referred to. The purpose of that day is to go through the issues and develop an action plan for both short-term and long-term solutions.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, consultation is good, but given that the agencies are already warning about more closures, including a foster care program, enhanced respite services, and four more group homes, when will the minister admit that the budgetary increases are ineffective and commit to funding at least 30 per cent more to increase staff wages?

Ms Tarchuk: Mr. Speaker, I would say that consultation is important. While I have on a regular basis met with co-chairs and CEOs of our authorities, I've also met with contracted agencies on several different occasions. What's really important about May 27 is getting all the players together for a day and actually finding out what the issues are and, more importantly, what it is that we can do to help them.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert, followed by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Random Dog Searches

Mr. Allred: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Through you to the hon. Minister of Justice. Madam Minister, with the recent Supreme Court decision with regard to the use of sniffer dogs to detect drugs in schools, school authorities and enforcement agencies are concerned about the ramifications of this decision on the proliferation of drug traffic in our schools. Why is the use of sniffer dogs different for schools as opposed to searching for drugs at airports and border crossings?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's important to note, as I said last time in this House, that the Supreme Court ruling is very complex. It contains a number of separate judgments given by different judges. What is clear is that a key factor in the court's ruling was, generally speaking, that there are greater security and safety concerns at border crossings and airport terminals than in schools. The differences in these concerns means that the public has, in their interpretation, a lower expectation of privacy at airports

and border crossings. Basically, the court's ruling rested considerably on the fact that people have a greater expectation that their bags and luggage will be searched at airports than in bus terminals and schools.

2:20

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Allred: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental to the hon. minister: is the notwithstanding clause an appropriate remedy to remove this restriction in Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The notwithstanding clause is not an appropriate remedy. In fact, it is often misunderstood. The notwithstanding clause only allows a provincial government to use it if legislation has somehow been involved, and the Supreme Court of Canada decision did not involve legislation. It involved common law.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Allred: Yes, Mr. Speaker. My final supplemental if I might. What steps, then, is the hon. minister taking to address this issue?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I said last time in the House, this is an issue that departments across the country are looking at. There has been considerable interest from other provinces and from the federal government, and given that interest and the concern expressed and the fact that this is a very complex decision, I'll be asking to have it added to the agenda for the next federal-provincial-territorial ministers' meeting.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Funding for Nonprofit Agencies

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Nonprofit organizations in Alberta provide invaluable services that have become vital to our communities and social well-being. Today's reality is that they struggle with funding. Funding is tied to specific program delivery, not operational expenses. Now many agencies, from the Canadian Paraplegic Association to the sexual assault centres, are struggling to pay the rent just to keep the doors open. To the Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs. There is no disputing that rents are out of control, but this government has done nothing. What is this minister prepared to do to help nonprofit agencies survive?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Fritz: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. That question is a surprise from the Member for Lethbridge-East because she knows very well how much we do for people that are either homeless, low income, moderate income, with rent supplement. Especially in your community recently with the situation of the rental market in Lethbridge we worked very closely with the Lethbridge Housing Authority, and that was through the rent supplement program and through assisting people that were in need of housing. As well, we assisted many people with physical barriers to housing with

remaining in the homes that were in place in Lethbridge. So I don't know where you're leading with this question, but I'm interested.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you very much for that answer, and yes, I can't begin to say how grateful we were for the minister's help in getting that funding; however, it was for housing. I'm speaking of nonprofit organizations.

To the same minister. These agencies are critical to helping vulnerable and victimized citizens. Will the minister immediately investigate the situation and report back to the House with a solution, and would you commit to solving the problem, or is the government really prepared to take over these services?

Mrs. Fritz: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'd invite the member to give me which agencies that she is discussing, and I'd look at that. I'd like you to do that, hon. member. Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you. I would be delighted to work with the minister on this.

To the Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security. There is a very large surplus in the victims of crime fund. Millions of dollars are sitting there not being used to help victims. Would the minister consider this surplus to help sexual assault centres deal with massive increases in rent? Do the victims they serve not deserve at least that much?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government does appreciate the work that our volunteers in our communities do to prevent crime and look after victims of crime. As a matter of fact, in this budget we are planning on hopefully increasing the funds to these organizations.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Alexander Rutherford Scholarships

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the Rutherford achievement scholarship was expanded to include high school students who record annual averages of 75 to 79.9 per cent in addition to those students who have averages of 80 per cent. My question is for the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology. With typical entrance requirements for universities above 80 per cent in this province how can the minister ensure that this new group of students will access postsecondary institutions?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Indeed, yesterday it was great news for students in Alberta in the postsecondary and those wanting to move into postsecondary. The \$1,500 in financial awards under this expansion can be used for the entire spectrum of our postsecondary system. The new expansion is part of that commitment to ensure that students have access to the system, part of the affordability framework. Today, for example, students can choose from about 200 undergraduate degrees, umpteen diploma and certificate programs across the province. I would encourage all of those students to apply to the program of their choice and to apply at not one but more than one of our institutions because we have a

wide spectrum of those things and because our transfer system in this province is second to none.

Mrs. Sarich: Mr. Speaker, my second question is also for the same minister. With the cost of living rising every day, are these financial awards going to be enough to realistically help students with paying for their postsecondary studies?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I've said many times in this House, the affordability of postsecondary education is not just tuition. It isn't just living. It's the whole package; it's the affordability framework. That encompasses all of the costs that the students might be looking at. So by beefing up the Rutherford scholarships, by beefing up the other scholarships that we have in the program, we've been able to recognize, as an example, the Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation. We have the most generous scholarship program in the country as well as the most generous student finance in the country.

Mrs. Sarich: Mr. Speaker, my third and final question is for the same minister. I'm hearing concerns from parents in my constituency of Edmonton-Decore that the current students enrolled in grade 12 may miss out on this expansion. Can the minister please clarify whether this is the case?

Mr. Horner: Actually, Mr. Speaker, we have recognized that perhaps the timelines were a bit tight, so as part of this enhancement and as part of the announcement we have extended the deadline for application for grade 12 students to June 1. I would encourage all grade 12 students to apply. They apply during their grade 12 year. It's never too late because they can apply in the grade 12 year, we can go back and verify the marks in grades 10, 11, and 12, and they will qualify for the award scholarships in those years.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Children and Youth Services Caseworkers

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As stated by the Child Welfare League of America, "When systems are short-staffed, bad things can happen." Studies of critical incidents, including child deaths, child injuries, and children missing from foster care, almost always involve an overworked caseworker who didn't have sufficient time to adequately assess or monitor the child's situation. In addition to leading to such tragedies, insufficient staffing results in ineffective services. To the Minister of Children and Youth Services: what is the current average caseload for employees of the ministry?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Tarchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The first thing I'd like to say is that Children and Youth Services has a very hard-working and a very professional workforce that we're very proud of. They make a positive and a real difference in the lives of children every single day.

With respect to workload I can tell you that we do have a workload committee that consists of AUPE members as well as management and staff. We also have a workload appeals process. The other important note, I think, to mention is the casework practice model, the work that's being done there. We're champion-

ing it in 13 different sites. It's all about looking at how we deliver the services differently and workload issues.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that we've had reports of social workers handling upwards of between 30 to 50 cases at a time, how can this government be ensuring the calibre of services necessary in order to provide children with the quality services they need and keep caseworkers doing the service that needs to be done for children?

Ms Tarchuk: Again, Mr. Speaker, I just reiterate that we do have a workload appeals process and this committee, so I would suggest that if that's the case for individuals, that's where they take that. As well, I would highlight the casework practice model because that is about reducing workload and doing far more assessment work at the front end, and it will be helpful.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question: does the new casework model outline guidelines for maximum caseload numbers? Is there a maximum?

Ms Tarchuk: Actually, I'll have to get back to you on that. I'm not sure if there is a maximum. I do know that the staff is very involved in determining what their workload should be, and the experience of the last year as we move forward and roll it out in the next year will be very helpful. But I will look into that.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

2:30 Homelessness Initiatives

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have a homeless population that needs to be kept safe in our province. My question is to the Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs. Can the minister advise the Legislature how communities are coping with the need to provide homeless people a safe environment for the night?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I agree with the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie. It is really critical that we do provide a safe, secure shelter for people without homes. I've found that it's really the local communities, the municipalities, organizations. They know the best way to keep the people in their communities that are homeless safe. An example would be in Calgary. We had the Mustard Seed recently come forward for shelter spaces in the industrial area. We supported them with 371 spaces. We do provide \$38 million for 3,100 shelter spaces in Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental to the same minister. There are far too many young people living on the streets. Can the minister tell us what her department is doing to help young people find more secure housing?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Fritz: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. In addition to our youth

emergency shelters young people have access to exactly the same services that serve all homeless people, and it's the transitional housing initiative that provides funding to help people make the transition from shelters to safe, independent housing. Many of those initiatives are targeted to youth. An example for you would be the Medicine Hat affordable housing centennial development project. They're currently creating 30 units of transitional housing, and that includes for high-risk youth.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final supplemental to the same minister: what is the minister doing to address the long-term issue of homelessness?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Fritz: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I know the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie is new, and I'd be pleased to talk about this further with him. We have addressed it in the Assembly before. It is the Secretariat for Action on Homelessness, which is a very important part of our plan to provide safety, security, and sustainability for our homeless, and that, of course, is through a wide range of programs and supportive housing. It is a 10-year provincial strategy. As you know, there are 12 members on the secretariat. Many of them are working hard. They're meeting every three weeks in development of the plan.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by the hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

CART Services in the Legislative Assembly

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Closed captioning, or CART, communication access real time, is the mode of communication used by 1 in 8 people in Alberta with hearing loss. They use this in order to participate in public life, but this service is not available at the Alberta Legislature. My questions are to the Minister of Infrastructure. Why are these citizens denied closed captioning in the public and members' galleries of the proceedings of this House? They can read it online, but they can't if they come in person.

Speaker's Ruling

Questions outside Ministerial Responsibility

The Speaker: That question does not fall under the purview of the Minister of Infrastructure. That would fall under the purview of the Members' Services Committee. There are two members of the Official Opposition on that committee, and I'd welcome them advancing that question to the upcoming Members' Services Committee.

Ms Blakeman: I have two additional questions on the same topic.

The Speaker: But if it's on the same subject, they will be inappropriate.

Ms Blakeman: Fine. I'll pass that on. Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

Family Violence

Ms Calahasen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Family violence is an issue that can have devastating and lasting consequences for those

affected. In my constituency we have agencies and organizations which do a great job to help when family violence occurs, but they still need support. Would the Minister of Children and Youth Services explain what she is doing to ensure my constituents and other Albertans are safe in their own communities and their homes?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Tarchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The member is right in saying that family violence does have devastating consequences for everyone in this province. It is a very complex issue, and we are taking action on a number of fronts to make sure that Albertans do feel safe in their homes and their communities. As examples, Children and Youth Services has increased funding for women's shelters and sexual assault centres. We've developed a 24-hour, seven-day-a-week family violence information line, which has been very successful, developed safe visitation pilot sites for high-risk family violence situations. I think we're the first in the country to make changes to our Protection Against Family Violence Act to provide more protection for victims, including supporting individuals to safely stay in their homes.

Ms Calahasen: Well, Mr. Speaker, aboriginal and immigrant families, of course, face many challenges and many barriers when they're dealing with government support services. Could the minister please explain what you are doing to ensure that aboriginal and immigrant families do not face those barriers or those challenges?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Tarchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As this member may know, this was a mandate coming from the Premier. Under the crime reduction and safe communities initiative we're investing a million dollars in '08-09 to expand supports for aboriginals and immigrants affected by family violence. These supports will include developing culturally appropriate public awareness and education resources, training for social workers and treatment providers about how to help children exposed to family violence, and enhancing outreach services specifically targeted for aboriginal and immigrant communities.

Ms Calahasen: It's great to see that we are dealing with immigrant and aboriginal families, but what are we doing to be able to deal with community-based family violence so that my constituents can feel safe?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Tarchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think it's worth mentioning that our family violence and bullying initiative involves nine different ministries in this government, and this year we'll be spending \$49 million on those efforts.

With respect to how we're supporting our communities, I think all of us have a large role to play. We find that our communities are critical partners for us. In the last three years we've spent \$12 million on 312 community projects through the community incentive fund, and these projects have been very successful, supporting those affected by family violence and bullying and addressing the serious issues that they face.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Homelessness Initiatives

(continued)

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Addressing homelessness calls for more than just shelters. A safer solution would be getting people off the streets for good and not just for the night. My question is for the Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs. Can the minister tell us what her department is doing to keep homeless people safe beyond funding shelter spaces?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Fritz: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We do have initiatives, like transitional housing, that are providing people that are homeless with safe, secure places to live and, along with that, supports to help them become independent. An example would be the Housing First concept. It provides housing to homeless people as a first step, and then from that safe environment it provides services to address addictions and create jobs and life skills. That project, Housing First, which you've heard of before, is being piloted across the province, in municipalities like Calgary, Red Deer.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. A question to the same minister: can the minister explain the difference between the outreach pilot projects and the homeless initiatives?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The purpose is the same, but it's important to note that the program is different. Outreach pilot projects have a two-year commitment, and their success is reviewed upon completion to see if they have value as longer term strategies whereas the homeless initiatives target funding to communities for their local priorities, and they may be ongoing operations or services to meet an identified need. Here in Edmonton Hope Mission is doing just that.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much. To the same minister: if the outreach pilot projects are in their second year of a two-year funding, what's going to happen to them at the end of this year?

Mrs. Fritz: Well, Mr. Speaker, some of the pilot projects may become best practices for future services, and those that are successful will be recognized for funding through established programs. I think that approach is going to give us an opportunity to move forward with the programs that show real results.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Funding for Police Officers

Mr. Horne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's Crime Reduction and Safe Communities Task Force recommends adding more police resources across the province, and in fact the Edmonton Police Commission has raised the need for additional police officers in our capital city. My questions are for the Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security. Although the Edmonton Police Commission asked for 60 new officers, out of a hundred new police officers the government is funding this year, only 35 were allocated to the Edmonton Police Service. Can the minister tell us, please, what is

being done to ensure that the Edmonton Police Service receives the resources it needs to protect our citizens?

Mr. Lindsay: Mr. Speaker, municipalities over 5,000 are generally responsible for policing and set their own budgets based on the resources that they have. That being said, however, we do recognize that the province can provide support, and this year we have allocated a hundred new officers for municipal police services. To be eligible, the police services had to be up to strength. They had to be able to train and hire these new officers and demonstrate where these new officers would be used.

2:40

Mr. Horne: Mr. Speaker, I just have one supplementary question for the minister. Spread across the province, a hundred officers does not seem like much. How effective can 100 officers be when it comes to reducing crime on a provincial basis?

Mr. Lindsay: Mr. Speaker, over the past three years there have been 600 municipal and provincial police officers that have been added to our province, and we'll continue to build on this total over the next three years. While it is important to get more police officers on the streets, that is only part of our safe communities strategy. We're also funding new initiatives and expanding other, existing programs that support police to allow them to focus on more serious crime.

The Speaker: That was 113 questions and responses, and in 30 seconds from now we will revert to our Routine.

Hon. members, might we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests

(continued)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

Ms Calahasen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour today to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly a very big go-getter in the aboriginal world, Ms Muriel Stanley Venne, who's seated in the members' gallery. I'd ask that she be recognized and given the warm welcome of this Assembly.

Members' Statements

(continued)

The Speaker: Now the hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake with her member's statement.

Esquao Awards for Aboriginal Women

Ms Calahasen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last Thursday, May 1, hundreds gathered to celebrate the outstanding achievements of Alberta's aboriginal women at the 2008 Esquao awards here in Edmonton. These awards were founded and established by Muriel Stanley Venne, president of the Institute for the Advancement of Aboriginal Women, who I introduced earlier, because she believed that aboriginal women needed to be recognized for their contributions to society, a recognition they received at a gala held for them. The Minister of Aboriginal Relations and many of my colleagues from all parties of this House also attended. It was a privilege to be the comaster of ceremonies along with the vice-president of the MNA.

Mr. Speaker, 23 exceptional aboriginal women were recognized

for their achievements in the categories of science and technology, leadership, justice, health and medicine, community involvement, culture, education, business, social services, and advocacy. The women who were honoured each play a vital role in helping to build Alberta's future. Each of them contributes in their own way to building communities. They are the foundation of families. They are the business leaders, cultural teachers, and mothers. They serve as exceptional role models for all those who struggle to overcome adversity.

These aboriginal women are part of a broader vision for Alberta, a vision that promotes tolerance, inclusion, dignity, and respect. They have faced many challenges with pride, intelligence, and confidence, ultimately leading them to excel beyond their own expectations.

Mr. Speaker, I'm proud to acknowledge and offer my congratulations on behalf of all members of this House to the following award recipients: Kari Thomason, Crystal Janvier, Angela Ferguson, Chesare Cardinal, Lorraine Boucher, Germaine Anderson, Victoria Whalen, Sharon Bourque, Doreen Moyah, Martha Campiou, Susie Fischer, Darlene Collins, Maria Vermillion, Antoinette McDonald, Doreen Roy, Violet Campiou, Dora Courteoreille, Vera Potts, Margaret Quinney, Vina Roberts-Marten, Sherryl Sewepagaham, Norah Calliou, and Kathleen McHugh.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Mental Health Week

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak about Mental Health Week. May 5 to May 11 has been proclaimed national Mental Health Week in Canada. This year's theme is Mental Health: Make It Your Business and focuses on the role that employers and businesses can play in making their workplace a mentally healthy and productive environment.

Mental health is a crucial part of our overall health. It influences how we feel, perceive, think, communicate, and understand the world around us. Good mental health allows people to reach their full potential and play an active part in our society. The Alberta government has and will continue to play a role in ensuring the delivery of mental health services in Alberta. Strengthening the treatment of mental health illness in the community supports the hon. Premier's plan to improve Albertans' quality of life.

Mental illness has a profound impact on our society. It affects individuals of all ages, all cultures, and all educational and income levels. In Alberta mental illness affects 1 in 4 employees. One million Canadians live with a severe or persistent mental illness, and approximately 8 per cent of adults will experience major depression at some time in their lives. Each year mental health costs employers \$33 billion in lost productivity across the country, while 35 million days are lost each year due to mental illness. Did you know that almost one-half of those who feel they have suffered from depression or anxiety have never gone to see a doctor about this problem? Stigma or discrimination or shame attached to mental illness presents a serious barrier in today's society.

In raising awareness of Mental Health Week, there will be a number of events in communities throughout Alberta.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

David Thompson Brigade

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On May 2 I had the pleasure of meeting with Brooke Martens, a constituent of

Edmonton-Gold Bar and an organizer for the 2008 David Thompson Brigade. The David Thompson Brigade is a canoe trip through four provinces, three watersheds, and two centuries of Canadian history. This nine-week trip starts May 10 in Rocky Mountain House and ends July 12 at the old Fort William historic site in Thunder Bay, Ontario.

Sixteen teams in 25-foot voyageur-style canoes will travel over a route that covers much of the same territory mapped by David Thompson 200 years ago. During the trip the voyageurs will engage local communities in raising awareness of Thompson's 1808 trip eastward following the successful crossing of the Rocky Mountains via Howse Pass in 1807. Next Tuesday the voyageurs will pass through Edmonton, south of this Legislative Assembly, on the North Saskatchewan River. They will camp overnight by Fort Saskatchewan and then will make their way to the Victoria Settlement historic site the next day. They travel very fast.

Brooke Martens and her committee have been organizing this trip for three years. This voyage is partially funded from the lottery fund. I would urge those who are interested to please consider joining the voyageurs for a few days or a few weeks on this historical adventure, if people have the spare time. Please visit the website at www.2008thompsonbrigade.com for all the details.

I would like to thank the citizens of Edmonton-Gold Bar who graciously donated the Alberta flags which will fly from the stern of each canoe. I would also like to extend best wishes on behalf of all members of this Assembly to the voyageurs and also thank the communities in northern Alberta, Saskatchewan, and beyond who planned events to commemorate this historic journey.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater.

Emergency Preparedness Week

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In Alberta we're not immune to sudden weather changes or the possibility of large industrial accidents. We are susceptible to wildfires, flooding, severe winter storms, and, of course, tornadoes. The government of Alberta through the Alberta Emergency Management Agency encourages individuals and families to become better prepared to face a range of emergencies any time, anywhere.

May 4 to May 10 is Emergency Preparedness Week, a campaign that encourages all Albertans to be prepared to cope on their own for at least the first 72 hours of an emergency while rescue workers help those in desperate need. All provinces and territories participate in this week, as do police officers, firefighters, paramedics, emergency management officers, industry, and nongovernmental organizations.

There are three simple steps that will better prepare Albertans to face a range of emergencies: first, know the risks in your community or region; second, make a plan so that you and your family will know what to do; and third, prepare an emergency kit and have it on hand. Planning and preparing for emergencies can significantly reduce the impact of an emergency or disaster and help Albertans recover more quickly.

Mr. Speaker, I encourage all members of the Assembly to take the time to learn about the steps they can take to keep their families safe in the event of an emergency and also remind them that being prepared is not reserved for one week of the year but is a year-round activity.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

2:50 Events in Wetaskiwin-Camrose Constituency

Mr. Olson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to have the opportunity to talk a little bit about events of some significance that happened in my constituency recently. Firstly, last week the county of Wetaskiwin celebrated the 50th anniversary of its creation, and the hon. members for Drayton Valley-Calmar and Lacombe-Ponoka were there as well as myself to celebrate. Two things were very apparent about this event. One is that we've gone through a lot of changes in the last 50 years in Alberta. One of the things we heard was that in 1958 a yard of gravel cost 10 cents; now it costs about \$18. The other thing that was obvious was that organizations that collaborate with each other tend to thrive and succeed, and it was great to hear representatives from various neighbouring jurisdictions speak about the achievements resulting from these partnerships. The county of Wetaskiwin has proven that adapting to changing times and working with your neighbours are the keys to success.

The second event was at Griffiths-Scott middle school in Millet. This school began a journey back in 2003 to be designated as a UNESCO ASPnet school. ASP stands for associated schools project, and that's a world-wide network of some 7,000 schools in 172 countries. Their focus is on global awareness and appreciation of diversity. This school achieved this status last fall, and in doing so, they became one of only five schools in Canada to be able to fly the UNESCO flag. This past weekend they celebrated these efforts, which have included things like raising money for building a school in Sudan, holocaust awareness, aboriginal awareness, environmental responsibility, and so on. They also hosted a group of Grant MacEwan students who are walking from Calgary. They all deserve our congratulations.

Presenting Petitions

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to present a couple of petitions here today signed by some 40 residents of Edmonton, Wabamun, Stony Plain, Spruce Grove, Jarvie, Darwell, and Jasper that reads:

We the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to commission an independent and public inquiry into the Alberta Government's administration of or involvement with the Local Authorities Pension Plan, the Public Service Pension Plan, and the Alberta Teachers' Retirement Fund.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, rise to present a petition to the House urging that there be "an independent and public inquiry into the Alberta Government's administration of or involvement with the Local Authorities Pension Plan, the Public Service Pension Plan, and the Alberta Teachers' Retirement Fund."

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two petitions. The first is calling upon the Legislative Assembly "to pass legislation that will prohibit emotional bullying and psychological harassment in the workplace." There are 36 signatures from Calgary constituents.

The second urges the government to conduct a public inquiry which would look at the local authorities pension plan, the public service pension plan, and the Alberta teachers' retirement fund.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, have a petition signed by 20 concerned citizens here. It reads:

We the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to commission an independent and public inquiry into the Alberta Government's administration of or involvement with the Local Authorities Pension Plan, the Public Service Pension Plan, and the Alberta Teachers' Retirement Fund.

Introduction of Bills

**Bill 13
Financial Institutions Statutes
Amendment Act, 2008**

Mr. Fawcett: Mr. Speaker, I request leave to introduce Bill 13, the Financial Institutions Statutes Amendment Act, 2008.

This legislation affects the Credit Union Act and the Alberta Treasury Branches Act. Besides several housekeeping and administrative changes, this bill modernizes and enhances the legislative and regulatory efficiency of the Credit Union Act. Through this act the government is also ensuring that the ATB operates under similar standards as other institutions.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 13 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd move that Bill 13 be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

Tabling Returns and Reports

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to table four copies of a document that the majority of Albertans seem to have indicated they don't support. It's provided to me by the Leader of the Opposition. It's called the Liberal health plan.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. First, I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of documents which were put out today by an organization called Who Cares? Alberta, which is deeply concerned that the provincial budget will not resolve the severe staff shortage crisis facing human service agencies in Alberta.

As well, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of letters from five Albertans, all of whom reside in the riding of the Minister of Employment and Immigration, calling for changes to Alberta's labour laws to create a fairer labour relations climate in the province. The letters are from Linda Kelly, Rhonda Gibson, and Faye Rever of Grimshaw, Norma Maxwell of Spirit River, and Pete Dechant of Fairview.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of the hon. Mrs. Klimchuk, Minister of Service Alberta, pursuant to the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act the Freedom

of Information and Protection of Privacy annual report 2006-07.

On behalf of the hon. Mr. Liepert, Minister of Health and Wellness, pursuant to the Health Professions Act the College of Registered Psychiatric Nurses of Alberta 2007 annual report, the Alberta College of Medical Diagnostic & Therapeutic Technologists annual report 2007, the College of Licensed Practical Nurses of Alberta 2007 annual report, the Alberta College of Combined Laboratory and X-ray Technologists annual report 2007 dated March 31, 2008, the Alberta College and Association of Chiropractors annual report to government 2006-2007 and attached financial statements dated June 30, 2007, and the College of Dietitians of Alberta annual report 2006-2007.

Orders of the Day

Committee of Supply

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: I'd like to call the Committee of Supply to order.

Main Estimates 2008-09

Tourism, Parks and Recreation

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation.

Mrs. Ady: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to present the estimates for Tourism, Parks and Recreation for 2008-2009. Joining me today are some of the key people who help keep my ministry running smoothly. I have Bill Werry, deputy minister; Bob Scott, assistant deputy minister of tourism; Dave Nielsen, acting assistant deputy minister of parks; Lloyd Bentz, executive director of sports and recreation; Pam Arnston, senior financial officer and executive director of financial services; Derek Coke-Kerr, managing director of Travel Alberta; Anne Douglas, director of communications; and in the gallery Susan Cribbs, executive director of policy, planning, and legislative services.

Mr. Chairman, Tourism, Parks and Recreation contributes positively to the quality of life of all Albertans. Our vision is to ensure that Alberta is a world-class tourism destination with active and healthy citizens and beautiful natural landscapes that are both protected and accessible. Our ministry touches the lives of virtually all Albertans.

The estimates that I present today support programs that help us to achieve our strategic priorities. These are to develop a long-term plan to preserve and manage our parks and recreation areas, to continue diversifying our economy by creating the conditions for a thriving tourism industry in every region of our province, to help individuals and communities lead active, healthy lives through participation in sports and recreation, to take advantage of the sports, tourism, and cultural opportunities associated with the 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Games, and to help our athletes achieve not just their personal best but a chance at the podium.

In addition, we will continue to repair and replace deteriorating infrastructure in our parks and recreation facilities.

3:00

Budget 2008 focuses on fulfilling commitments and implementing new plans to secure our future. My mandate from the Premier is to develop a long-term plan to ensure that Alberta parks and recreation areas are protected and accessible. I intend to bring forward a draft

plan for government to review shortly and to seek approval to discuss the plan with park users, aboriginal groups, conservationists, and recreation users. Our objective is to ensure that we achieve a balance between preservation and recreational access.

The ministry's 2008-2009 total program expense is \$248.2 million, a \$1.7 million increase from the 2007-08 forecast. This budget invests in areas that impact Albertans: recreation and sports, tourism marketing and development, and the preservation of our landscapes and natural heritage. Some highlights of this budget include an additional \$10 million for tourism marketing and development based on an increase in revenue generated by a 4 per cent tourism levy.

This year \$67.2 million will be available to develop and market Alberta's tourism destinations. This will allow us to take advantage of the marketing opportunities around the 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games in Vancouver. Successful marketing depends on having great product and destinations to promote, so funding will also be used to assist operators with research and to help them develop new tourism product. This is important for regional economic development.

The department also helps smaller operators to get their product investment ready and help them to connect with investors. This is an important service because tourism in Alberta is a \$5 billion value-added industry employing more than 111,000 people. Our goal is to increase revenue from this sector to the \$6.5 billion mark by 2011. To reach that goal, we need to be able to respond effectively to changing global situations. The Travel Alberta Act now being debated in the Legislature is intended to accomplish this and to create a more business-focused entity with strong governance and accountability.

This budget also includes an additional \$2.6 million for operating expenses in our network of 500 provincial parks and a further \$35 million for capital upgrades, maintenance and renewal, and equipment. Since 2004 we have been reinvesting to catch up on our deferred maintenance. Just over \$200 million has been allocated to facilities' upgrades and renewal or replacement. The work we've done has helped to improve our park visitors' experiences, giving them cleaner water, better waste disposal systems, new facilities, and more recreational opportunities, but there's still a lot more to be done. For instance, we plan to upgrade the infrastructure at Pigeon Lake provincial park and at William A. Switzer provincial park. We will refurbish campsites, replace water and sewer systems, and improve trails.

This year resources will also be provided to develop an online reservation system to better meet the changing need of campers, and, Mr. Chairman, work will also continue on developing the Glenbow Ranch provincial park and the Lois Hole centennial provincial park. While the capital region river valley park is not part of the provincial network, this budget allocates \$50 million to support this vision for a vibrant river valley park stretching from Devon to Fort Saskatchewan. It's a good one. The project is a great example of a successful collaboration between seven different municipalities to achieve a common goal. It's also the kind of co-operative model for developing parks that we hope to encourage going forward. The capital region river valley park project offers exciting possibilities for tourism, sport, and recreation for more than one-third of Alberta's population. So it's an excellent fit with our ministry goals.

Budget 2008 also includes a \$20 million capital grant to the Calgary Olympic Development Association. It's the second instalment of our government's \$69 million commitment to renovate the 1988 winter Olympic legacy facilities and to support CODA's centre of sport excellence.

To support Alberta's athletes as they train for the Olympic and Paralympic Games, \$1.5 million is allocated to Podium Alberta, a high-performance athletic assistance program, to supplement the federal support that nationally carded athletes receive. We want our athletes to focus on their training instead of their bills. Over three years \$4.5 million will be provided to Podium Alberta through Alberta Sport, Recreation, Parks & Wildlife Foundation. With a budget of just under \$25 million the foundation provides grants to over a hundred recreation and sports associations, helping to build leaders and nurture talent. It also supports Alberta Games and events like the 2010 Arctic Winter Games. The foundation helps to develop coaches and volunteers and supports active living strategies to engage ordinary Albertans.

Mr. Chairman, this is an investment to encourage Albertans to lead healthy, active lives. Sports and recreation offer great benefits, especially to our youth. Research indicates that when young people are involved in sports and recreation, they have better academic results. In addition to the health and social benefits that you might expect, this budget supports programs that contribute to our health and well-being. Our department is listening to Albertans and to what they value. I believe my ministry's efforts to improve Alberta's quality of life and to address growth pressures will have a positive impact on our economy and our population.

I look forward to your consideration of our ministry's 2008-2009 estimates. I'd be pleased to answer questions. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity. Before you start, hon. member, is it the chair's understanding that you wish to combine your times with the hon. minister on a back-and-forth starting now?

Mr. Chase: Sure. The way things will work: the minister asked for the first 10 minutes, I'll take the second 10, and then we'll alternate within those two 20 minute time frames, question/answer, question/answer. But I would like to give my opening remarks, and then we'll go back and forth.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you. The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. I'm hopeful. I've talked to the minister about her plans – we've had short but frank discussions – and I'm starting off with great hopes that things are going to change.

I just want to talk about the upcoming May long weekend. I wanted to talk about it as an experienced camp operator. My wife and I operated a small wilderness campground in the southeast Kananaskis, 13 kilometres up the forestry road off highway 40. Highwood House was the junction from where we started. From a camp operator's point of view and from a camper's point of view that May long weekend can be a horrific experience. Now, the minister mentioned that seven parks will have a temporary liquor ban, but I would encourage the minister to extend that ban because it's the liquor-fuelled foolishness that basically holds campers and camp attendants hostage over that weekend.

The very few times I've ever had to bring in conservation officers had to do with the long weekends, whether it's May, July, August, or September. But the worst weekend of all is that May long weekend because people have basically been in an urban hibernating circumstance and they want to go out and they want to let loose. What the problem is is that the majority of people who come out to the wilderness are there for wilderness purposes. They're there with their kids. They're there as seniors. The last thing they want to do

is deal with – and it's not teenagers. Teenagers get a bad rap because they do some foolish things sometimes associated with their grad parties. But my experience has been that it's the 30-some-things, that have the money and have the vehicles and can afford a variety of liquor, which they then consume in rapid fashion.

It's been my experience to walk into a campground – and I used to joke with the conservation officers – equipped with a registration envelope and a golf pencil. I would try to get to these people before they got into the heavy consumption of liquor. But when you've got 200 sites and there's a rush on the weekend and people who are in this partying mood can hardly wait to get the Jack Daniels or that can of beer cracked open, they don't think about registering first. Because there aren't sufficient conservation officers, they're spread over such a large area that even if there is a little bit of extra enforcement, which I very much appreciate – for example, at Indian Graves and Ghost-Waiparous and some of the more notorious backwood campgrounds – that enforcement has to happen throughout. There is no doubt that the extra enforcement is most needed on long weekends.

3:10

As I say, in 2002 we had the G-8, and we had the Canadian army, we had a whole series of extra seasonal conservation officers, as well as the regular conservation officers, and that year was basically a dream year. In years succeeding, in 2003 and 2004, the number of conservation officers, especially seasonals, dropped. Conservation offices were closed, like the one, as I mentioned, at the Highwood, and what that ended up being is a hostage scenario. We would encourage campers to come out, but then we were always on duty intervening against acts of stupidity and acts of random foolishness.

Now, there is the foolishness of the liquor, which is sort of at the root of a lot of the foolishness, and that can be dealt with with extra enforcement, but those liquor bans have to extend, as I said, to different parks. My experience has been that where I was, 60 kilometres away or farther from Turner Valley, where the closest RCMP detachment was, in three years I saw the RCMP once. They came out because a camper had been lost, and a search took place, and that was the only time in three years that I ever saw the RCMP out there.

Now, in 2002 conservation officers did what they do best, and that's communicate with campers. They talked to them about the fishing areas. They talked about the wonderful hiking down to the three sets of falls at Cataract Creek. They talked to them about Mount Burke. They talked to them about Raspberry Ridge. They talked about camper safety. They would go around and individually introduce themselves to the campers, and they would point out that coolers on benches end up with bears being shot. They had that time to go around and personally connect and provide the information. That was in 2002. That wasn't possible in 2003, and it wasn't possible in 2004.

Without the conservation officers' presence campers do not feel as secure. My wife and I would do our best to provide information. We built a little library. We tried to imitate what was happening in the larger provincial parks and the national parks, but we were kept so busy, especially on long weekends, just policing that our quality time with campers was very much impeded. So what I would hope that I could pass on is the need for conservation officers not to be spread so thin. They're the first enforcers, they're the first supporters, they're the first source of information, and they're also not the first but the second source of safety. The first source of safety is, actually, the campground operators because it's the campground operators that are most likely to come upon any kind of injury or accident, flat tire, whatever it might be, that impedes the enjoyment of campers.

However – and this is something I would hope the minister would look into – the current radio systems in the backcountries that involve radio towers and CB communications have so many blind spots in them as to be ineffective. If you have to drive several kilometres to reach a high promontory from which to make an emergent call, then you've lost valuable time. The RCMP have the luxury of having satellite telephones. The conservation officers don't have that same equipment, so as they're doing their patrolling, they have sometimes as great a difficulty communicating with the base, like the Sheep ranger station or in the Peter Lougheed Centre, as do the camp operators. What I would ask is: please review the communications systems.

Conservation officers have told me that other than in the Peter Lougheed, the first part of that park, where there is actually tourist information, from then on in there's no place to provide information that "I'm taking my family for a hike" or "We're going to hike in and do random camping" or if it's to cross-country ski "Our plan is to ski to this particular area." That isn't possible when you get into the wilderness areas because those conservation offices have been closed. I would encourage for safety's sake as well as the information's sake, to please restaff those offices. They're still there. The space is just basically being used as closet space, and that's a shame.

We've got such wonderful potentials in Alberta, but unless we reinvest in them – and I thank the minister for mentioning the amounts of money that are going to go into rebuilding. If I could offer a suggestion with regard to that rebuilding: when you get into the wilderness areas, please have part of that maintenance deal with Texas gates. What happens currently under the – I call it guise for lack of a better word – term "multi-use" is that local ranchers are given permission to bring trailer load upon trailer load, transport truckload of cattle, and they turn them loose in the summer. [Mr. Chase's speaking time expired] We'll continue.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Ady: Thank you. Many good points the hon. member has brought up and, obviously, has spent a lot of time in our parks, and it shows. I just want to thank him.

When I look at the staffing in parks – and that is one issue that we have been looking at – in budget 2007-08 we have increased the FTEs, I think the hon. member will be happy to know, for parks and protected areas to 445, or a 76 per cent increase, of our total ministry personnel that are now in our parks. There are 310 permanent staff members and 135 seasonal help. So there are 60 more staff added in the 2007-2008 budget. Now, I know this is a big province and that there are 504 parks, and that's stretching people, but our intent is to improve in this area. We recognize it is an area that we need to reinvest in.

We also appreciate how deeply Albertans care about their parks, and that shows up in what we heard the hon. member talking about, the 2,500 volunteers that are building trails and doing maintenance and doing wildlife monitoring. They're like our park stewards. They do scientific research and education and other tasks. We know that these volunteers are out there because they love the parks and they want to contribute. Like the hon. member said, you know, he has spent long weekends out there trying to support our parks and to make them better for those that go.

We also know that the May long weekend is a problem. He's right. We've been jammed up in our houses all winter. We're tired of being inside, and there's this rush to go outside. I'm always amazed at how many trailers are actually leaving the city of Calgary on the May long weekend. You almost can't get in the way of the

stampede. It looks like there's some kind of trailer convention happening somewhere. I know they're all moving out into our parks.

He's absolutely right that liquor causes difficulty in these parks. I was talking to my constituency assistant, and she told me that last year on the May long weekend they were out, and the group next to them were drinking. She said it was the first time she'd ever really felt afraid camping by the time they got to about midnight.

I think that the hon. member is right, and I think that our department has tried to react to that with the liquor bans that we've put on. Obviously, if those liquor bans need to be expanded, we're going to monitor those situations over this May long weekend. We'll see where the trouble spots are. We did have trouble last year with conservation officers being attacked when they went in and tried to manage this. We can't really mix alcohol and this May long weekend. We find that after the May long weekend enough families join us out there that it kind of lessens that, but there does tend to be a bit of whooping up going on on the May long weekend.

Our department is committed to trying to manage that and to ensuring that people feel safe in the parks. That's why we brought the liquor ban on, and that's why we will continue to monitor it. For those members that don't like that, go the next weekend.

3:20

As well, the member talked to me earlier about the referees that exist, and I would agree with him that we do need those referees. Sometimes people get into campgrounds and they get pretty territorial and things happen. Again, I'm grateful for those 2,500 volunteers because we have a lot of camp hosts, if you will, that come into our parks and help. They're the eyes and the ears for our conservation officers who can't be everywhere at the same time.

As far as communication goes, I think it will reassure the hon. member to know that the department assures me that we now have satellite phones and that we have a FireNet service system that has been there for the last several years, so perhaps after the hon. member was volunteering. We have improved our communications; you're right. If you're running around going, "Can you hear me now?" and you've got trouble, it's too late. And it's too hard to find a high spot; I would agree with the hon. member. I was glad to hear that our department assures me that we do have some satellite phones in operation now.

I would just like to say that we love our parks. I know the hon. member loves them because he's donated his time to go out and ensure that they stay wonderful. I think all Albertans love them. They want us to take care of them, and they want to enjoy them. It's part of what creates quality of life for us in this province. We want to be able to enjoy them.

I thank the hon. member for his questions.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I'll just continue with the multi-use concept. I talked about dropping off trailer loads of cattle. The problem is that cattle can't tell the difference between Crown land and provincial parkland. I tried instructing them, but they didn't listen, and the ones that didn't listen the most were great big tonnage-style bulls. When you've literally got cattle going through your campground, rubbing up against tents, knocking over picnic tables, and so on, the attraction that European visitors first had when they saw this piece of western history is quickly lost when, you know, they find large deposits in the form of welcoming cards around their firepits.

There are simple solutions. Simple solution number one: clean

out the Texas gates. Simple solution number two – and it's not a costly solution – fix the fencing. What's happened in so many areas over the years is that part of the deterioration has been the barbed wire fencing. If the fencing were up, then the cattle between the Texas gates and the fencing would be kept out, campers could enjoy the circumstance, and the cattle could feed in the area. But as it is now, with the deterioration, that can't happen.

What I would really encourage also to promote tourism, parks, and recreation is the restoration of the trails. A number of trails – and I've had this discussion with the minister – have had to be shut down, some because they've deteriorated to such a point that they're no longer safe. In other cases they've had to be shut down because of an animal in the vicinity. Now, an animal in the vicinity is the best reason for shutting down a trail, but sometimes they stay there for a lengthy period of time.

Now, in terms of the rules of the campground, I've confronted individuals armed with chainsaws, some person who figures that why should they buy the high-priced firewood when they can simply cut their own. So here we go with a chainsaw, 11 o'clock at night, in a campground with kids. I come up to the individual, and I'm supposed to reason with him? I've come across individuals with military shotguns poking out of their backpacks because they were afraid of going into the wilderness because they'd heard there were grizzlies there. Instead they're in the campground with a loaded military shotgun, with a large bowie knife hanging from their hip. If you don't think that's intimidating to campers.

Then you've got the individuals who fired off a bear banger, which is used to scare away bears. This was on a long weekend, a full campground. This guy wanted to demonstrate to his children that he could protect them in the event that a bear came. So what did he do? He scared the heck out of 200 families in the park who thought that some kind of a murder was taking place. This is why we need conservation officers patrolling regularly in the parks: to support, to inform, to protect.

Just as part of *Hansard*, and as the minister started, people who go out into the campground have to be prepared, but in their preparation they cannot interfere with other people's enjoyment. Another common circumstance was the person who brought along their construction generator because they wanted to watch the DVDs with the kids. So the generator is roaring along, and, you know, if I didn't catch it the first time around, campers would make sure I caught it the second time around. Part of the camp responsibility was that we'd do a tour at 11 o'clock at night to make sure things were calming down.

Well, I'll tell you, getting a rap on your trailer at 2:30 in the morning when you've got significant loads of registration cash and it's pitch black can be a very scary experience for the operator. One of the things that I would really encourage the ministry to do is just localized CB radios so that the wife or the husband, whoever is in the trailer, can at least communicate within that park loop from a safety point of view to provide backup. Then the person with the larger CB system – and you've mentioned that there's improved communication – can call out for backup if they need it.

Now, I don't believe that every conservation officer is equipped with satellite phones. If that has changed, good on your ministry. If it hasn't, please, it's a small expense, and it's well worth it.

In terms of tourism I'm not going to go on because I did at length last night about the beauty of our wilderness. What we have to do is make sure we protect it.

I'm sort of winding around – and I'll sit down quickly – but another concern with multi-use is the harvesting of timber in and around the park areas. My experience in Cataract Creek was that

they clear-cut right around the park, then the park roads were used for clear-cutting themselves. The haulers were not allowed according to provincial law to haul on Friday, Saturday, or Sunday of a long weekend, but they did, and there was no enforcement to keep them from doing it.

Let's protect what we've got. I'll sit down and enjoy the second set of opportunities.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Ady: Thank you. Obviously, the hon. member has extensive experience in the park and has seen probably everything in his time spent there. If you kind of were stringing them all on a string, it would look like there was a lot going wrong in the parks all the time. I'm sure that's probably not true, but I'm sure that over time you've seen a lot of different circumstances in the park.

I just want to touch on some of the things that I think are positive, and then I'll try and answer some of the hon. member's questions. It's important to know that in our provincial parks and protected places – I didn't know when I first became minister, but there are 504 of them. There are a lot of provincial parks in this province. They spread out across the province and across the landscape. We attract some 8.5 million visits a year to those parks, so we know they're being successful, because people are coming. They contribute almost \$1.3 billion to our economy, which also is a very good news story for us.

Our visitor surveys indicate that our visitors enjoy Alberta's provincial parks, but they do want the facilities to be repaired, as the hon. member was talking about, and to be upgraded. We're addressing this need in significant ways. Since 2004 my ministry has allocated more than \$200 million to repair and upgrade park infrastructure. Our parks really did need a major facelift, and they're receiving that at this time. As a result, the percentage of park facilities in good condition has increased by 13 per cent. I think that's a good first step. Obviously, we need to continue this improvement, and we are.

3:30

The funding for park infrastructure requirement continues to be a priority, like I say, a further \$35 million in this year. We are prioritizing the projects by their impact on the quality of services provided to visitors. Examples include campsite road resurfacing and paving, building repairing and painting, construction of new showers and washroom facilities – which I think is very important – water treatment distribution systems and sewer lines, picnic table and firepit replacement. In the plan for parks, which I intend to bring forward this year, we'll continue to strengthen Alberta's park systems, including its infrastructure.

As for the grizzly bear example, I just want the hon. member to know that hunting for grizzly bear is not permitted anywhere in the province this year. As you know, there's a ban on that.

Mr. Chase: It's for protection.

Mrs. Ady: Yeah. We are protecting those at this point in time. A lot has been done in the last 30 years to reduce illegal self-defence killing of grizzly bears. In the parks we've undertaken a lot of initiatives to keep people and bears safe, including planning facilities and infrastructure to reduce human-wildlife conflicts and implement state of the art garbage systems. As well, we're trying very hard to educate the public about bear safety – it's a prime focus – and to provide outreach programs, brochures, information through Bear-Smart signage within parks to warn the public of grizzly and black bear activity when appropriate.

As to the Texas gates and the maintenance of them, I take the hon. member's point. If you've got Texas gates and, you know, they're overgrown, then they're of no value, and we should be looking at those wherever we have livestock and recreation facilities coming together. I'll be frank. I was raised in Hawaii, so I have a picture in my mind of what a beach is. I spent many a summer at Little Bow provincial park sharing the beach with the cows, and I'm thinking: what are the cows doing on the beach? I had to chase them off a few times because I didn't think they should be there, but obviously they felt differently.

Mr. McFarland: Sure. They swam across the lake.

Mrs. Ady: The hon. Member for Little Bow says they're swimming across the lake, so I'm not sure a cattle gate would help us in that instance. But, again, I take his point.

Mr. McFarland: They saw you.

Mrs. Ady: They came to see me, yes.

As far as regulating common sense, that is such a difficult thing to do. Why people do certain things and why they don't understand the impact on their neighbours, I think is a surprise to each of us when we see those things happen. Setting off that big bear sound in a park and giving about 9,000 people a heart attack doesn't make sense. So the hon. member is right that we need people that can monitor and help support us when people don't use common sense in the park and they really, really start to bother their neighbours.

As far as conservation officers we've brought 14 new full-time conservation officers on this year alone. As I said before, we hope to keep on improving that and making sure that we are doing a better job in our parks.

A construction generator. I have a construction generator that's going in my new house right now. They're loud. I'd be really upset if my neighbours wound one up and I was camping. Again, it's hard to legislate common sense and again why we do need some referees in the park.

As far as communication: no, not all conservation officers have a satellite phone; only those that are in areas where they can't use typical cellphones. Those areas that you were talking about, where they don't work, are the ones that we've given the satellite phones to so that they can get in contact and get the backup that they need.

I think that I have covered most, except for the commercial logging issue. We've talked about this before. The hon. member will know that only 60 per cent of Kananaskis is actually park. He has of course raised the issue of: why can't we at least create a bit of a barrier between the park edge and where commercial logging could take place? With respect to industrial development on lands under the Provincial Parks Act, though – the wilderness areas, ecological reserves, natural areas, and heritage rangeland areas – commercial logging is prohibited in all classes of parks and protected areas. Again, when we get to the edge of a park which is not, then we have that difficulty. We have to think about those things. I know that clear-cut logging is not a general practice but something that we perhaps should take a further look at. But we only monitor what happens in the parks; when it gets outside, you'd have to talk to the hon. Minister of SRD.

I think that's all.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I appreciate the exchange and the answers. There's no doubt that the ministries have to work together: SRD, fisheries, forestry, and so on.

The most negative experience I had from a clear-cutting point of view was in the summer of 2003 when the Lost Creek fire was raging. There were campfire bans throughout the area, but Spray Lakes logging was allowed to clear-cut and harvest throughout the night within a half kilometre of the campground. It was like, you know, being part of an alien invasion. This clear-cutting went on for just about the entire month, until it was finally shut down. We couldn't have mosquito coils lit in the campground, yet this highly grating industrial activity, this clear-cutting, could take place because there was greater condensation at night.

Well, this is where multi-use has to be – and this is why I use the term "referee." We have to prioritize. The harvesting is primarily done in the fall, after the campgrounds close, but unfortunately, maybe due to road conditions or the winter circumstances, they aren't able to get all the logs out. So certain exemptions are provided. But if they override those exemptions – you cannot have a logging truck and a large recreation unit on the same thin gravel forestry road. Something is going to give, and there will be damages.

I want to move on now to recreation because recreation, as I've mentioned before, is the orphan in Tourism, Parks and Recreation. I have some questions. The first has to do with podium athletes. There's a new \$1.5 million investment to supplement the nationally carded athletes that are residents of Alberta. Athletes at this level have traditionally been viewed as a federal . . . [Mr. Chase's speaking time expired] I'll continue on with the back and forth. We have one more set of 20.

Mrs. Ady: Thank you, hon. member. I think about the only question that I heard in this particular piece was on the logging trucks. The department tells me that on the weekends, Friday evening through Sunday, logging trucks are banned on those roads when recreation vehicles are there and present. I mean, we are trying to keep those two pieces of traffic separate. So that is one of our attempts to try and manage that problem.

Thank you.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I appreciate that we have the regulations, but what we need is the enforcement.

Continuing on with regard to sports, I was talking about the podium athlete program. Athletes at this level have traditionally been viewed as a federal responsibility. There does not appear to be any new investment in programming for developing emerging athletes from Alberta. I know you've talked about this a little bit, and maybe you can just qualify it a bit more. What new investment has been made to encourage Albertans to become or remain active and/or to provide opportunities for our youth to participate in sport?

Secondly, the Alberta sports plan has never been officially adopted by the government, and it is now eight years old. What is the current information or policy used for decision-making related to the budget announcements? What conversations were held with the sport community to identify the priorities funded in the budget?

The creation of a new plan is an important step for sport, and it is essential to keep moving us forward toward the creation of a comprehensive sport policy for Alberta. What is the process and timeline for the development of a new Alberta sports plan with the 2020 horizon as was promised during the election?

The culture policy was proposed by this government as an all-encompassing policy that would feature the integral role of sport. There is minimal reference to sport in the policy, and now the policy is under a separate ministry, Culture and Community Spirit. Again, it has to do with co-ordination between ministries. Responsibilities for sport are now even more split because they're between two

ministries: one for funding, Tourism, Parks and Recreation, that's under the minister's auspices, and the other for sport policy that falls under Culture and Community Spirit. So sports is getting more fragmented instead of recognized under a single ministry.

Based on the government's press release of April 22 there was also a \$2.4 million net increase in various other programs. We are told this has been internally allocated for ongoing operations of sport and recreation. Does this go to government bureaucracy, or will it be used to enhance programming to assist the volunteers who lead the many sports and recreation associations in this province and to assist Albertans, in particular our youth, to become involved in sporting activities?

3:40

These are questions that have been passed along to me to be asked. I appreciate the fact that so many individuals are interested in tourism, parks, and recreation. I'm sure the hon. member, given the lively nature of her family, has probably participated in coaching activity or has certainly been along the sidelines, cheering her family on.

Sports are becoming more and more exclusive based on membership fees. Probably the most expensive sport is hockey, even with buying second-hand equipment. Probably the second most expensive are the football programs. Even though soccer is basically an equipment-free sport, the registrations for community soccer, like the Blizzard program that I coached for years and years, indoor and out, have become so expensive as to make them unavailable to a greater number of Alberta families. At the same time, we have growing childhood obesity. We have an attraction for deviant gang membership activities.

I'm hoping the minister can give me and others some hope that the recreational aspects, covering fees for the less fortunate, encouraging community sports, both at the elite level and at the community toddler/tot level, will be encouraged. I'll sit down and look forward to any good-news announcements and directions you can provide in that area.

Mrs. Ady: Thank you, hon. member. I'll start with where you ended and then move backwards. As the mother of four boys I spent more time in the family van driving boys to sporting events. You can't imagine. I mean, my husband and I used to tag team. He'd go one way, and I'd go the other. I think I know where every school is in the city of Calgary. I've been in the gyms, spent many hours in all of them because we felt strongly that with four very active boys in the city that they needed to be busy, and that not only their physical well-being but their mental well-being was better served if they were tired at night. Trust me, I think we were tired at night; they were still bouncing. We really believe strongly in the ability of our boys to be able to participate in sports.

Now, because of expense – and the hon. member talked about hockey – we chose basketball because we knew that by the time we tried to outfit four boys and put them all on the ice and get them involved in programs that it would be quite prohibitive. So we chose basketball because it was just a pair of shoes and, you know, there wasn't as much of an equipment cost and more availability, if you will.

I do know that these sports organizations are very expensive. I worked very closely within the Mid-Sun organization for years. We had a lot of programs within those organizations, though, for families that could not afford to put their kids in sports albeit, you know, some of them were very embarrassed to approach us at times, and I even tripped over families that wouldn't ask because they didn't want to ask. Often we would find them in the communities,

and we would encourage them, or we would do it on their behalf. We spent a lot of time trying to ensure that kids did get to be active. First of all, I'd like to give kudos to members of those organizations out across the province who spend a lot of time working with kids and ensuring kids get to participate and that they get to play sports because I know how important it is.

As far as what we're doing as a ministry, he talked about the sports plan. The sports plan has a lot of components. First of all, it's a facility thing. I mean, we used to fight over those gyms like you can't imagine, for time in a gym that we could practise our kids. Indoor soccer or basketball: we all competed. Even though we had a lot of schools in the city and other sports facilities, we competed. Our facilities had started to age in this province. They were some 40 years old.

With this sports plan we committed to first of all refurbishing facilities across this province to the tune of I think it was \$200 million that we spent on that. Yeah, \$200 million on the refurbishing, but we needed new. We don't have enough. I think of those families that always say to me: I'm getting up at 4 in the morning to drive my kids, you know, four hours south to get a one-hour time to practise hockey. I know that with the new MSI program, my community is now applying for two new sheets of ice, just in the south end of the city. I'm really glad for the work that has been done on the renewal of facilities so that more kids can participate.

The other piece, of course, is that we need more coaches, as the hon. member was talking about. Who's going to spend the time to teach these kids? One of my jobs at Mid-Sun used to be – I used to participate in helping organize the basketball – to find coaches, and it was hard at times to find enough coaches for all the kids that wanted to play. We have a wonderful foundation that supports training programs for over 2,500 volunteer coaches each year. We need to be able to train that next generation and ensure that they're there.

Every two years the foundation hosts four games involving 6,500 volunteers, which leave a tremendous legacy for each host community. In this two-year cycle over 7,700 Albertans participate in the Alberta and the interprovincial games. I remember the year my son went to Grande Prairie to be in the Summer Games. It was a big experience. We had a fabulous time up there. My only problem was that my husband thought he was getting the hotel reservations for Fort McMurray. He didn't know there was a difference at the time, so I had a difficulty there. But we spent a wonderful weekend up there watching the province compete.

The Percy Page Centre provides an additional 65 provincial sports, recreation, active living, and arts organizations. The interprovincial games provide a stepping stone for that next generation of national and international athletes. We have done a lot to implement the programs in this new sports plan. As I said before, we're developing programs for athletes and coaches through the establishment of four regional sports development centres to do this kind of work, which is a new piece of information.

I used to always go back to the boys that I had coached or participated with for years prior and asked them to come back and contribute. That's one of the things we found with this Olympic program that we're so excited about. If we keep athletes in Alberta training, even at that really high performance level, they often stay here. They inspire the next generation. They become our coaches. They become our officials. That's really, if you want to talk about seed stock for the next generation, where you can do a lot of really good work. Many of the boys that were coaching for me in the 20 to 25 range had come through the program, and they had loved being in it themselves, and I never had a hard time talking them into

coming back and coaching that next generation. It's an important thing.

We increased funding to provincial sports and recreation associations. Annual funding increased by \$4 million in help, provided additional support for hosting events. Like I said, we're committing \$1.5 million to support the 2010 Arctic Winter Games. Last week, of course, we announced Podium Alberta, as I said before, which helps our athletes train in this province at a very high level in hopes that they can fulfill the dreams that they have when it comes to their expenses. Again, we've announced the \$20 million instalment for that centre of sports excellence, which I think is going to do so much for the supporting sports organizations.

Another thing is that when I look at different programs that we've supported, I look at the Canmore Nordic Centre, which we just reinvested in. I went up there not so long ago, and I was watching these world-class athletes, the most panoramic picture you've ever seen in your life. I'm often jealous of the Member for Banff-Cochrane because she lives, I don't know, as close to heaven as you can get. I watched these world-class athletes going up the hill. Who was trailing behind them? Groups of kids. I couldn't believe how many kids were involved in programs that didn't require, you know, indoor facilities, but they were outdoor facilities in winter. I was impressed with how many of them were out there actually following their heroes up the hill. Like I said, we've got the sports athletes piece.

The foundation provides, as I said before, about \$7.5 million annually to support about 104 provincial sport and recreation associations. These associations in turn leverage this contribution by approximately six times and provide services to 1.2 million Albertans every year. I do think we've done a lot of work around this particular sports program, and I would agree with the member: obesity is something that is just frightening as we look forward, and we need to do a better job.

I was trying to see what else I might have missed.

On the Alberta sports plan what's in the 2020 vision for sports? We have a 2020 vision piece right now that we're looking at and that we will be implementing as we go forward. Again, I'm excited because it looks down the road how we can implement and encourage more kids to participate.

3:50

I always remember a comment that Gary Mar – he's not here any longer – used to make. When parents would argue about who should be bused and who shouldn't, he said: I think all kids should be bused; we should just drop them all a mile from the school so that they all could walk the mile to school. In all honesty, hon. member, I had four sons, two of them very high-level athletes. I have one really sedentary son. He considers himself a gamer. Any other parents heard that word "gamer"? Keeping him encouraged and keeping him active was a big challenge for me. He did not like competitive sport. He didn't like group sport. We had a really difficult challenge in trying to find ways that got him off that chair in the computer room and forced him into activity. We worked at it as parents.

He was in a scouting group, so he used the parks that we were talking about earlier. I used to put that backpack on his back and force him to go out. He never got eaten by a bear; I was always happy about that. Today he loves to backpack. He doesn't like competitive sport, he would never join a soccer team or a basketball team, but he's active. So there are a lot of ways we can do this and a lot of ways we can encourage youth to participate in this.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. One of the athletes you might

have seen at the Canmore Nordic Centre is a cousin of my wife, Hannah Perry. She's in the cross-country. The government, to its credit, has done a good job in funding for what I would call the iconic areas like the Canmore Nordic Centre. My hope is that now that a lot of the sewage and the water and the upgrading has been done at the Nordic Centre with this, you know, \$22 million, \$20 million, and so on, hopefully some of that money will now be freed up to go into the wilderness campgrounds.

I was at the Max Bell arena this past fall, talking with members from the Canadian hockey association. They indicated that Calgary was short 12 arenas, I think the figure was. You've mentioned this. This is a large concern. Again, it's a more expensive sport, but when you consider all the different versions of on-ice activities, from ringette to hockey to figure skating and so on, we definitely have a need for those arenas. In some cases upgrading the current community arenas – I know that through the lottery grants this is one of the ways we can do it. Again, I would encourage you to work with other ministries, such as Culture, to provide that.

Something that I'm hoping will happen during your ministry is the Andy Russell I'tai Sah Kòp provincial park. This is the area that is out in the Pincher Creek area. I'tai Sah Kòp is a Piikani or Peigan word for meeting place, gathering place. Andy Russell, as I know you are well aware, is a famous Albertan, a guide, an outdoorsman. This land actually used to be part of Waterton national park up until about the mid-1930s. Restoring that to park status would be part of the Yellowstone to Yukon wildlife corridor, so I would really encourage looking at that.

I'd also encourage looking at the Moose Mountain park. This is what I talked about last night when I talked about where *Brokeback Mountain* was filmed. This Moose Mountain area is connected just outside the Bragg Creek area. I would really encourage you to talk to individuals like Dr. Ralph Cartar, who is a biology professor at the U of C, because that Bragg Creek coalition is trying to regain their park. The cross-country trails have been impeded. There used to be a cross-country area, but it's been so badly cut up. It would be really nice to re-establish that.

So Andy Russell, Moose Mountain, and then buying back the mineral rights for areas like the Rumsey ecological area so that we could re-establish them as protected areas. I think it would be a very worthwhile expense.

I will sit down and look forward to answers. I just want to let you know that in our next go-around my very capable colleague from Calgary-Buffalo will be pursuing more sports questions. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Ady: Thank you. One of the questions that I forgot to answer last time – I apologize – is the fact that sports and park are part of the cultural policy. The hon. member does have his finger on something. It's something that we're working on this fall. Obviously, if you separate ministries, there does tend to be some overlap, so we are at work on that. The departments are working very closely together, and we hope to have it resolved a bit this fall so that there's some clarity there.

You asked a few different questions, but first I'd like to just go back for a moment to what I think are the benefits of physical activity because we really want it on the record. I know that seems like a no-brainer to some people, but it's such an essential part of a healthy lifestyle. I know the hon. member worked with kids for years, and he could probably see the difference between those kids that were active and those kids that were not. Again, I say that in my own home I could tell the difference.

I always tell this story. I have a son going to med school in New York in the Bronx. I went in to visit with him, and I was shocked at

the obesity levels. I had never seen obesity like that before. In fact, I rarely saw anybody that wasn't obese. Now, I don't think we're there yet, but we're trending that way. I was in a school just yesterday, at a school opener. No, not everybody was obese, but a lot more children than I thought would be were. It's the type 2 diabetes that's a real concern.

Being active has benefits such as reducing the risk of dying prematurely – that's an obvious one – reducing the risk of heart and colon disease, type 2 diabetes. It helps to prevent hypertension. It helps to control weight, promotes philosophical well-being, reduces stress, anxiety, depression. Certainly, in this room we could all use more opportunities to go down into the basement.

I'm working with my colleagues around the country to achieve our target of a 10 per cent increase in physical activity by the year 2010.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill. Hon. member, will you do 20 minutes back and forth?

Dr. Brown: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. I don't think I'll need anywhere near that time.

The Deputy Chair: All right. Fine.

Dr. Brown: Mr. Chairman, thank you. I do have a concern and a question for the minister regarding the budget for this year, and it relates particularly to a special interest of mine, which is Fish Creek provincial park. It's something that I've raised in the House on previous occasions. I have a special interest in Fish Creek provincial park due to in part my family's history. They settled in what is now part of Fish Creek park over 120 years ago.

Also, I grew up on the edge of Fish Creek park, and I believe that I have some special knowledge of that, not only in my capacity as a biologist but because of the fact that I've watched the progress of that park over a number of years. It pains me to say that I believe that the park, while it's been managed quite well for the use of recreational users and so on, is not being well managed for the purposes of maintaining a semblance of a natural ecosystem, which is extremely valuable in the Calgary area, being a large urban area, and particularly in maintaining the riparian and grassland habitats which characterized the park when it was created in 1975.

The difficulty with the management of the park has been that there hasn't been a recognition, in my estimation, of good management practices for maintaining that grassland. A good grassland ecosystem is maintained by external forces such as grazing, fire, or cutting. It can't be maintained by benign neglect, and that's what's happened in Fish Creek provincial park. If you go down there now, you'll find that it's a biological disaster, quite frankly. Invasive species like Canada thistle, brome grass, and so on, are choking out the plant communities that are native to that area, and it really is lamentable.

I guess the question that I have for the minister is whether or not the minister would have any funds in her budget for the coming year to have an investigation into the status of that park in terms of its biological diversity and the maintenance of the grassland plant community and whether or not we can get some biologists, some ecologists, some botanists, or somebody who knows what they're doing hired to get on the staff and to do a recovery program for that park. Otherwise, it is fast disappearing. You might as well turn it into Coney Island. It's not going to have any resemblance to a natural ecosystem.

4:00

What do we want to do? What are we doing right now? One of the things that we're doing that is completely abhorrent, in my view,

to maintaining that natural ecosystem is that we're encouraging funeral homes to plant trees in the park which are not even native, those particular varieties of trees, into a grassland ecosystem. We're turning it into a forest. We're trying to. I would like some response, and I'd like some answers as to what we can do to put some resources and some money and some budget in there to ensure that we have some proper expertise go into the management of that park.

Mrs. Ady: Hon. member, you have your finger on my favourite park in the province. I know I'm not supposed to have a favourite park, but it is out my backdoor, and I spend every morning out there. When you say it's an ecological disaster, I had no idea I was walking in an ecological disaster.

That being said, I have checked with the department, and basically they tell me that we now have an invasive species specialist – I don't know if that's a biologist, but it's an invasive species specialist – and that we have a new park science strategy, but there are no dollars in it yet. There is no money in that yet. What I can do is take the hon. member's comments under review and check back with my department and look into this issue. It's the first time that I've heard of it. Again I would tell you that I spend every morning in Fish Creek park. It's a beautiful park, has over 3 million visitors a year, and I had no idea that you felt like the grasslands were leaving us there because to me, you know, it seems well balanced, but then I'm not a biologist. Again, we'll take it under review, and we'll get back to the hon. member.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Thank you very much for allowing me to speak. I have some questions here for the minister that I will rattle off, and hopefully some of these have not already been asked. I appreciate her comments earlier about sharing the concern of the continuing rise of obesity levels here in Canada. I know we're not at the level of the United States because I, too, look like a slim man down in Las Vegas, and as we're well aware, I'm not one of those slim people. But I hear concern that we don't want to catch up to that society on that note.

If we look specifically here on page 284 of your business plan, it talks about furthering the recommendations of the Alberta active living strategy. I'll bang out a lot of questions here. Could the minister please give us an update of where we are on this and what recommendations are being furthered? Also on that note, I'd sort of like to know how this strategy has been working with the school system as one of the goals was to have physical education teachers in every school and to have some dedicated time for students to participate in activities. I'd like to hear an update on how that strategy is going and if all of the schools in Alberta have been able to have a dedicated physical education teacher – I believe that was one of the goals – or whether you are still working on that sort of process.

I think that if we also took a look at this, at the 2003 federal-provincial-territorial ministers' meeting in New Brunswick all the ministers agreed that increasing levels of physical activity among Canadians was a top priority. The ministers set a national target to increase levels of activity by 10 percentage points in each province and territory by 2010. I'd like to ask the minister where we are in achieving that goal and what actions, again, have we specifically taken and whether we've developed any sort of ability to track whether this rise has in fact happened or whether we're on pace for this type of goal. Basically, where are we on this? Was it on the ministry's sort of radar, and if it wasn't, will it be on the ministry's radar?

I'm jumping all around here. If we could just sort of go back to the parks and the operations of our provincial parks, have you identified any specific problems or concerns that require additional financial support in our provincial parks? How will this additional money be used? Which, if any, of the provincial parks have requested additional funding, and which of the parks are actually receiving money?

If we also, then, take a look in your business plan, page 283, strategy 2.1, "Ensure Alberta's parks and recreation areas remain protected yet accessible to Alberta's growing population," I was just wondering why this plan hasn't been developed before. When can we expect to see this plan in place? Does the ministry believe that this will ensure that our parks and protected areas receive the added protection from high-intensity off-highway vehicle use? This is a serious problem because these vehicles can access various thoroughfares and cutlines, and they can be very destructive to the natural environment.

I'm getting on in my 10 minutes, but I'd also like to touch on something that I came across earlier. It's regarding tourism, and it says your ministry is planning on marketing Alberta internationally. If we look at that, it is \$28.1 million, and that's up from last year's budgeted forecast of \$25.3 million. The concern here is: what is this advertising dollar? Who's it targeted to? Is this just going to go to a lump of friends that are going to say, "Hey, Alberta; it's a green Alberta"? What is the theory and strategy behind these ads? What areas will they be targeting? Can the minister tell us with certainty that none of her budget is used in enhancing the campaign of the Public Affairs Bureau? I think it's important that that is sort of indicated.

That was a few questions there. Sorry for spitting all those out there, and if you don't get to some, you can try and answer me in writing, and then we'll take a look at that. Thank you very much.

Mrs. Ady: Well, thank you. That was quite a bit. I'll try and keep up here. As I was already speaking earlier to your colleague about the physical education policy and you referenced it again, maybe I'll finish my comments on that. I'll be bringing forward an updated Alberta active living strategy in 2008 to help us achieve our goals around this area, but our ministry can't do it alone. We are right now working with Health and Wellness because, obviously, they're very involved. As well, the Minister of Education is involved in this area. Under Health and Wellness's building healthy communities we will be participating in this. We'll be bringing some ideas to the table and coming out in the year 2008, coming soon to a world near you, with this new healthy active living strategy. So I'll be able to better answer those questions after we get this policy put together. I do have a few ideas of my own. My boys always thought I was torturing them, but I wasn't. They're happy today.

As far as whether we're tracking, yes, we do track through the Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute. They are tracking. I think, though, that you're right. We need to be tracking. We need to know if the things that we're doing are having any impact in this area or if we're going to look up some day and have, like you said, the same issues or problems that they have in the States. How are they going to overcome that particular curve? We know what the costs are going to be to our health care system if we don't. As well, it's just what the impacts are to the future health of Albertans. So we are tracking.

As far as, you know, what I was saying before, we know what the impacts are, but we can't achieve this success alone. It's going to take good co-operation between this ministry, Health and Wellness, and Education to actually have an impact in these areas.

4:10

As far as more money in the parks I've got to tell you that we can always use more money in the parks, and anyone in this Assembly that would like to support me with more money for the parks is my new best friend. I want to thank the hon. member for that question.

Since 2004, I just want the hon. member to know, we've allocated more than \$200 million into the upgrade of parks. Our parks had aged just like all infrastructure across this province and definitely needed this kind of dollar infusion. So we're out there. We're working as hard and as fast as we can, but there's more work to be done. We're about 33 per cent of the way back.

The funding has helped us complete a number of major upgrades and repairs to the parks. Just to review, we've got four new centennial facilities in our parks, including a new visitor centre at the Boreal Centre for Bird Conservation. We've got \$2.5 million in upgrades and redevelopment of a park facility at Cypress Hills provincial park with an additional \$2.4 million to go towards water and sewer upgrades in 2008-2009; \$2 million in upgrades made to Wabamun Lake provincial park, including new washrooms, shower buildings, extensive upgrades to the park's water systems, rehabilitation of the park's campsites and installation of new power sites in the popular Aspen loop.

The completion of repairs due to severe flooding in 2005 to Fish Creek provincial park, which we've already heard about: I'm happy to say that those repairs have been completed. I just visited with Jim Stomp on Friday, and we're complete. The pathways are back. The bridges are repaired. I'm not certain about the grasslands, but I promise the hon. member that I'm going to look into that. That work has been done. The complete \$6.5 million redevelopment of Miquelon Lake provincial park with expanded campgrounds, new facilities, utility upgrades. Additional funding has been committed this year to complete the project.

These upgrades have greatly improved the park visitor experience, providing cleaner water, better facilities, and increased recreational opportunities, and we're not done yet. Over the next few years we'll be working to further upgrade areas, like the multiyear, \$4.5 million upgrade to William A. Switzer provincial park to refurbish campsites, put in new picnic tables, replace the water and sewer systems. You can hear a theme here: water and sewer systems. My plumber used to say to me: some things should always go downhill, and we should never see them again. I believe that's true. And to improve trails.

A \$230,000 commitment to planning and design work of infrastructure upgrades at the Pigeon Lake provincial park. Construction funds for upgrading the facilities at this park will be allocated over the next few years.

So as you can see, we're putting a lot of money into our parks and into upgrading our parks. We know and understand that this is important work and that we need to continue working on it, but again we could use more money. There's no question.

As far as the protection of parks we have a new park plan coming that we're working very hard at. It isn't ready yet. We're about to take it through the process within government, but we hope to be out for consultation this summer.

I've committed to spending two weeks up in northern Alberta going through our provincial parks, and I've only asked for two things. I want a shower at least every three days, and I don't want to be eaten by a bear. Those are my two minimal requirements.

An Hon. Member: Or a cougar.

Mrs. Ady: Well, cougars are different. They're friendlier for some

reason. I don't mind being eaten by a cougar; a bear bothers me.

That being said, I'm going to go through our parks because one of the things I want to do is ask people how they like and enjoy our parks. Is it working for them? We're going to be consulting this summer with all the user groups. You're right. We've got guys who are buying OHVs. They want to use those vehicles. How can we channel and find ways for them to do it? If we don't, they tend to go places we don't want them to go. So can we create the kinds of trail systems? We've been working on that and blending it into our park plan. This has been a big body of work. They've been working on it for two years. We're about to do some consultation. We're hoping to have the first cut of this plan ready by fall, so stay tuned. If the hon. member manages to get into the parks, I'd be happy to hear his feedback this year on how his park experience was and what he thinks should be happening as we put together I think a really important park plan as to how we plan on going forward in the future.

I think I hit most of yours except for perhaps Travel Alberta.

Mr. Hehr: Did you hit the schools, too, or did I fall asleep during that answer?

Mrs. Ady: I might have skipped right over that. You're talking about the athletic programs, the physical education and core programming. It's to continue to include the K to 12 physical education as part of core programming for Alberta students. We're going to continue to liaise with Alberta Education in support of this initiative. We haven't given up on it. I have been actually checking in with my schools to see how they think it's working. I still hear some of the irritation about not enough physical facilities, not enough gym time. I keep reminding them that these are hardy Canadian kids. We can run them outside as well as we can run – no, I don't want to run outside, but I do actually walk in the park every morning all through the winter. I think it's important that we continue the program. It doesn't always mean that there has to be an internal facility, but we are working on this, and we will provide support for teacher implementation of the current physical education programs that are existing. So we will continue to support it and hopefully improve upon it.

Mr. Hehr: Do we have numbers?

Mrs. Ady: As far as numbers on this program, I don't have them at my fingertips, but I'd be happy to get those for the hon. member.

Your last question was about how we advertise this great province. I want the hon. member to know that 50 per cent of all tourism is generated by the people who live here. They get it. They know where we live. They understand what a wonderful product we have here. But, as well, 50 per cent of all tourism comes from outside of this province. You can pick a lot of places in this world. There are a lot of places you can go and try and advertise what we have here, but we do target to those places that come the most and where we think we have the best opportunities.

There's a real science behind how you promote in this tourism game, and that's why we have the bill in front of you that you see in Bill 2 as we try to create the corporation to help us be more effective in this area. We have a very good marketing arm in Travel Alberta right now, but we think it can even be better. We do target those countries outside. Travel Alberta has their stay a little longer program for internal, but when it comes to outside, we focus on New York and California markets through partnerships, PR advertising, trade shows with CTC, TV spots, and newspaper articles. The U.S. is still Alberta's second-largest market.

Again, the Olympic-Paralympic experience. We think we can market a tremendous amount through this time period because the world will be looking at Alberta via all of our World Cup events that you're going to be seeing as we ramp up to the Olympics. The entire world right now wants to come train in Alberta because we are the closest Olympic facilities to where they will be participating, so we're going to see a lot of countries coming here and have a lot of opportunities to showcase this province.

European campaigns in conjunction with the CTC include e-marketing campaigns, trade shows, and PR. We collaborate with the CTC campaign. We're trying right now to restore the Japanese market, and we are developing new air access with key overseas airline carriers. Sometimes it helps if this is where the plane comes. When I get out there in the world and talk to those that are looking at us, they see Canada as one big land mass. They don't identify Alberta, B.C., Saskatchewan. When we can get air carriers to come here directly, that's of real benefit to us in tourism and to leverage promotions with the CTC and other partners for the Beijing Olympics as well. So we will be doing that.

Yes, I did table the strategic marketing plan. The STMC is a group made up of industry, and they advise us every year in ways that we can improve on our marketing.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne. Do you wish to combine your time with the minister?

Mr. VanderBurg: We'll just go back and forth for 20 minutes or so.

The Deputy Chair: All right, hon. member.

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's great to hear what the minister's plans and the department's plans are for expanding the product here within Alberta. I think that's great. You know, we have a lot of great parks and a lot of facilities here in Alberta that were built for about 2 million Albertans, but, you know, the population is 3 and a half million, and we need more of that product within.

I'm wondering if within the budget the minister is considering any studies – or maybe you already have done some studies – with regard to the pricing of gasoline here in Alberta now. How many more locals are we going to keep here in Alberta because of \$1.20 a litre? I'll start with that, and we'll just keep building on that theme.

Mrs. Ady: The hon. member has his finger on something really important. He talks about the development of product. I've learned a lot about tourism since I've been in this ministry. The first thing I learned is that most people think that they're experts in tourism, first of all, because we've all been tourists, right? We feel like we have some expertise in this area. One of the things that I learned right out of the gate was that if somebody can do something within a hundred miles of their home, they're not going to necessarily drive to your neck of the woods to do it unless there's something that brings them there, a hook, if you will.

4:20

Mr. Chairman, we have a lot of hooks in this province. I was so impressed when I was in China last year in one of the loudest buildings I've ever been in in my life being interviewed about: what about Alberta, and why come here? I have to say that it was really great because I actually had a hook and a product to sell. Alberta has so much when you stack it up against the rest of the world with what it can offer in product. But the hon. member is right: we need more, and we need to encourage people to stay.

Transportation costs are part of the planning for every holiday. Albertans still pay, though, less for gasoline than other provinces, and the visitors from Europe are actually accustomed to paying higher fuel costs than we are.

We still believe that Alberta is a great deal, but we are watching this quite closely because we do know that the high price of fuel is really topical. It's out in the news. As people are planning their summer vacations, they are looking at it. It's one of the reasons we've launched the biggest ever stay in Alberta plan. It's called Stay. You're going to see it on the airways, on billboards, in newspapers. We're going to encourage Albertans to take a second look at Alberta this summer. Why go to Montana or B.C. or Saskatchewan when you've got some of the very, very best product in the world right here, right at home?

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, thank you. I'm glad you talked about hooks because, you know, there are some parks within your ministry that have excellent fishing very close to Edmonton. As a matter of fact, there are probably a million people that would love to come out to Whitecourt and fish for trout. I know the opportunities close to large communities like Edmonton, Calgary, Red Deer. A lot of the outside communities offer great opportunities.

This was probably before your time, Madam Minister, but I know that some of the fellows sitting in front of me can remember Stamp around Alberta. I thought it was a very successful program. I hope that your Stay program learns some things about the positive impact that Stamp around Alberta had.

Back to hooks. I want to talk about what your ministry is doing in this budget cycle to enhance the opportunities for parks and fishing. I'm just wondering if there's a plan related to destinations, like Carson Lake, that have excellent fishing. Are you planning on creating or expanding more of those opportunities within this great province?

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Ady: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I know that the hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne is an intrepid fisherman. Myself I've never actually successfully caught a fish, so I still have a difficult time understanding what people do with fishing rods. But he's certainly brought me many wonderful fish, and our family has enjoyed them at the family reunion, so I take his point.

Mr. Chairman, one of the things that we have done with the tourism levy, which I think has been a good idea, is that we have taken a portion of it and held it back to do research and development of new product. Some 20 per cent, or \$9 million, this year will be spent looking at the ideas that Albertans have out there for developing new product and, in fact, helping and investing in those areas as we try to find new ways to exchange or change our product and create more opportunities.

The hon. member is right. There's an opportunity in his own riding right now to create a new loop in a campground that will create more opportunity. It's a really popular park. A lot of people want to go there. A lot of people like to fish. Now, we argue all the time because I want to put my ski boat on that lake, and he says: no ski boats. I'm a water skier, so I see no value in a lake where you can't put a ski boat. But they like this lake. I know how important it is to him.

Mr. Chairman, we see some really interesting things in these developments, and I want to just spend a minute on that if I can for the hon. members here today. Sometimes people think that if you build it, people are just going to come, but we know that when it

comes to the development of new product, just because you want them to come doesn't mean they will. There's actually quite a bit of science around this. I think of one great example, and that is the Canadian barn dance.

Now, for those of you that don't know, my father-in-law, Jack Ady, used to be a member in this Chamber, and he had a farm in Hill Spring, Alberta. When I was first married, I went to the farm. I wasn't a farm girl. I learned all about what went on in the barn. It wasn't pretty, but I went out there, helped them birth a few cows, milked a few cows in there. Anyway, I was a city girl. I admit it. So while I was out there, the barn to me was a place, you know, that you wouldn't eat or do other things in, but it was the family farm, and so be it.

When my father-in-law ran for office, he ended up moving to Cardston because he, like other hon. members, didn't decide that his wife could continue to take care of the cows. So he sold the herd, and he moved into town and sold the ranch. He sold it to some people that had a bit of a different vision, Mr. Chairman. They took the barn. They made the whole upstairs a dance floor. A dance floor. For my in-laws' 50th wedding anniversary it was decided that we would go back to the original homestead and see what had been going on there.

We were in shock. I remember pulling into the yard, and there were 200 people eating dinner in the bottom of the barn, and there was a dance floor in the upper barn. The old slough they had turned into a lake. Canoes were drifting across it, and there were people building cabins around the slough.

I had to argue with my boys all the way there because they didn't want to go. They didn't think it would be fun. They were just with their female cousins. But when they got there, there was a whole bunch of people there, and they had some of the best times they've ever had at this Canadian barn dance. They had just a wonderful time. In fact, they've gone back with dates since then to the Canadian barn dance.

Now, I remember saying to father-in-law: "Jack, you just had no vision. You thought this was a farm or a ranch. You didn't know it was a great tourism product, yet look at the people come from far and wide." A great story about somebody who created product that actually worked. That's what my department spends a lot of time doing: helping people research, decide if it will work, decide if it's worth developing, and decide if it actually can attract tourism. So we do. We will be spending \$9 million this year researching and producing new product because we know we need it, and we know Albertans want it.

Thank you.

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, thank you. I appreciate the education on what city girls do in rural barns. It was different for me growing up in Whitecourt.

You know, we have an opportunity in constituencies like mine: the 12,500 square kilometres, a lot of Crown land, a lot of lakes, and a lot of opportunities to develop the lakes with our local chambers of commerce, with people that would love to even build private campgrounds. Are you considering those types of partnerships within the ministry? It's not always government driven. Maybe government just has to enable our business community to get to work and to create some partnerships with their government. Have you discussed that with your ministry? I think that those opportunities abound in northern Alberta. I'm just wondering what you're doing to promote that.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Ady: Thank you. I actually appreciate the question because I think it's a good one. As we look at this new product development, we often hear of that area called the lakeland district. I have to admit that I used to think Edmonton was the far north. It wasn't until I got into office that I realized that some people consider it the centre of the province. As I have not extensively travelled up north, that is one of the reasons I'm planning on spending time in northern Alberta this summer. We're going to take our ski boat. We're going to put it into some of these lakes that the hon. member is talking about.

We want to see what the opportunities are out there and see whether there is some opportunity for us to develop some partnerships. In fact, included in the park plan is: what kind of partnerships can we develop in these areas? Should government always develop and build the product? I actually had a great conversation just a few weeks ago with some developers that are saying: let us come and help you put some of this infrastructure in because we're looking for areas to develop.

One of the mandates the Premier gave me when I was associate minister was this idea that we want to stop if we can – a lot of Albertans are going to British Columbia and to Montana and into Saskatchewan to build their recreation property right now. Where else could we go in Alberta? You know, I know that the hon. member down the way from me, who has all the lakes in his constituency, continues to tell me how wonderful they are. So this summer I am going to put my boat on their lakes. Because they don't just allow fishing, we're going to do some exploring and see if there is some opportunity for some of that kind of development. As well, we have something called the rural tourism symposium, which annually hosts a session to put entrepreneurs together with investors. We try to get things that are ready for investors and then bring the investors to these groups.

4:30

I went to the rural roots that they have down in Calgary last summer. There was just a whole host of product there waiting to develop. So part of what our ministry is doing is that we're trying to make sure that entrepreneurs that have a great idea and know where there's good opportunities for this kind of development can get together with investors and with our department and become part of what I think will be a real happening thing for product development in this province.

Thank you.

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, we've been pretty well on a summer theme. I want to move on to our opportunities in the winter. You know, there are many of us that ice fish and snowmobile and ski and enjoy our winter activities. Again, an area like Whitecourt-Ste. Anne with a mix of cow-calf operators, oil and gas facilities, communities: unless we start designating some areas and helping those communities by designating snowmobile trails to keep people off private land and to give people an alternative rather than a free-for-all throughout our province – I think there are great opportunities in some of our communities.

Whitecourt hosts a snowmobile club that's worked with the town of Swan Hills and the town of Fox Creek. It's called the Golden Triangle. It attracts thousands and thousands of visitors every year snowmobiling in and around the Whitecourt area. We have communities, like Alberta Beach, that are half an hour outside of Edmonton, and the free-for-all exists. The communities like Alberta Beach and Lac Ste. Anne counties and the other communities around are really active in pursuing a more organized event and more organized product. I think, again, so close to Edmonton, with so

many people with snowmobiles that want to go and enjoy, you know, an afternoon of fishing out on the lake with their snowmobile and their trailer and their ice auger and their family, they also want to go out for an hour ride. What is your department doing to help these communities, like Alberta Beach, like Lac Ste. Anne county, to develop this product and keep people safe, keep people organized, keep people away from the cutting of barbed wire and accessing land that they shouldn't, and work to create those partnerships for these types of winter activities?

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Ady: Well, thank you. Great questions. Great questions, hon. member. The Alberta government knows that trails are important. He's right; if we don't create the trail opportunities – these vehicles exist. The need to use them exists. They're going somewhere. We've basically been working quite hard within this department. We have a trails committee that's been struck for the last – I'm aware of four years. Albertans have told us that they want us to manage this recreational trail network and give them better outdoor experiences. He's right; they don't want to be holed up in the house all winter. We're listening.

The Alberta Recreation Corridors Coordinating Committee is laying the groundwork for a recreation corridor designation program to make trails easier to use, operate, and manage. Ministry staff have been working with the committee and other ministries to develop the draft recreation corridor and trails designation program. The other initiative program recently provided \$1.2 million to help trail operators complete the Alberta portion of the Trans Canada Trail.

To further our commitment to the trail use in Alberta, we also launched a pilot trail mapping project in northeastern Alberta in partnership with Alberta Trailnet. The project identifies authorized trails, approved uses, trail managers, and points of interest along the trail. We think this will be an important element of the provincial trail designation program. It's intended to encourage safe, sustainable, and environmentally responsible recreational use of trails in this province. Now, Mr. Chairman, more work needs to be done around this area. We're aware of that. In the parks plan it's a very big portion of what we're looking at because more and more of these vehicles exist in the province. You know, those that say, "Let's not have it," I think need to recognize that there are a lot of Albertans, like the hon. member said, that want to get out. I've never understood the need to have a little tent on ice and cut a hole – you know, one person in there, no one to talk to – and fish through the ice. I don't get that, but I know that the hon. member has spent many a happy hour doing that and it's one of the things he loves to do.

Opportunities to be outside and enjoy this province are just as important in the winter as they are in the summer, and snowmobiling is one of the ways that we are encouraging that through this recreation trail co-ordinating committee.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, thank you. Back to summer activity. Alberta Beach is a classic example of a community that's so close to Edmonton and a free-for-all in the summer with boats and boaters from the city. You know, people will go out to the lake and put in a little boat stand out in the water and leave their boat parked there all summer long. They don't own property. They just come for the weekends, and they leave their boats out on the lake from Monday to Friday, and on Friday night they paddle out there or they carry

their five gallons of fuel and put it in their boat. It's not a great thing to do.

Minister, not long ago you were up in Cold Lake with a group. You can see what can be done by putting in some proper marinas with some proper parking for boat trailers, some proper fuel stations, that it's much more environmentally pleasing for our lakes to have those types of facilities. I think that we need to look at some opportunities around this great province to build some marinas, to be better at what we're doing out there. I'm just wondering if your staff has had an opportunity to identify those types of opportunities to do like we've done in Cold Lake. I think that was heavily funded by the province in partnership with the local chambers and business-people. I'm just wondering if those partnerships could exist or if you've discussed those within your ministry.

Mrs. Ady: Hmm, very interesting, the idea of some marinas. I think it's a great idea. I have a boat, so obviously I would think it's a great idea. I did actually park my boat once in the hon. member's riding at Little Bow provincial park. I hate to say it, but it was a woman driver who hit my boat, which was parked, and hit another boat. I wish it had been a male driver, but it was a woman driver that day. But we did enjoy being able to park it and leave it there.

Alberta Beach. Last year I think the ministry gave them around \$25,000 to begin to look at a plan for this. That's a start. But I think the hon. member's right. The very first time I went to Cold Lake and saw that marina – I've told you before that I'm from Hawaii – I was just shocked to see it there.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. It's a pleasure.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, do you wish to use the 20 minutes?

Mr. MacDonald: I would much prefer, if the hon. minister is agreeable, to have a question-and-answer exchange for that period of time, please.

The Deputy Chair: Fine. Okay. Go ahead.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you. First off, Mr. Chairman, I'm surprised that the hon. minister parks her boat and she doesn't moor it, but we won't go any further with that.

I have questions around the estimates here this afternoon and specifically in the government estimates, page 407, please. If I could have some clarification in regard to Tourism, Parks and Recreation. I know the department of culture has moved on, but in order to get some clarity on the estimates, if the hon. minister could please explain to me why there is a difference between the actuals in some of the line items on page 407. Why the substantial difference between those actuals and the actuals that are listed in the annual report for 2006-07? I understand that there's going to be a difference because culture has been removed. For instance, in recreation and sport we are estimating we are going to be having expenditures of \$51 million. In the previous year it was indicated here that we spent \$119 million, yet in the annual report from last year, there's a line item in there of \$22 million. Could I have an explanation as to why this is happening, please?

4:40

Mrs. Ady: As the hon. member is aware, first of all, there was a splitting of the ministry. We do restate in our annual report on a

comparable basis, which actually I couldn't describe to you if I wanted to. We would like to get back to the hon. member in writing on this issue.

Mr. MacDonald: Okay. Again in these government estimates, Mr. Chairman, there is no note that I can find that reflects those changes in the actuals. Or is there a note in the government estimates that I have missed?

Mrs. Ady: We believe it's on the front page, but if it's not there, we're happy to get back to the hon. member.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much. These numbers, one is to assume, hon. minister, would not be reflective of what is actually going to occur in the department this year.

Mrs. Ady: Actually, hon. member, I think you're mistaken. Yes, those are the budget numbers.

Mr. MacDonald: They are the budget numbers. The comparables and the actual numbers, when we remove the culture portfolio, are reflected in what is now the budget estimates for 2008-09. Correct?

Mrs. Ady: Yes. Those are correct.

Mr. MacDonald: Okay. Now, if we go to page 400 on Tourism, Parks, and Recreation, the voted expense by element, in ministry support services we see an increase in that expenditure. Why would that expenditure be going up when part of the portfolio has been shifted to another hon. minister?

Mrs. Ady: Well, obviously, hon. member, when you split a ministry, we both have an office now. So it's supporting two offices. It was a very, very large portfolio with a lot within it, so there was a split. In order to support those offices now, that's why it's gone up. There was a split in the ministry.

Mr. MacDonald: Okay. Again, Mr. Chairman, we would be looking at the actual expense. If we were to go back to 2006-07 for what programs and services are now being delivered by the hon. minister's office, we would note that that would be calculated to be \$223,000, and now it's gone up to \$549,000. The same applies for the deputy minister's office. In 2006-07 it was \$296,000 to administer these programs and policies; now we have an estimate of \$713,000. Regardless of the duties and the responsibilities it seems to be an expense that is growing without an adequate explanation.

Thank you.

Mrs. Ady: Well, the actuals were actually 50 per cent of the split. If you're looking at the estimate, obviously there has been some inflation. Again, these offices were split, so we're 50 per cent of the split, and there has been some inflation.

Mr. MacDonald: Some inflation in some quarters would be determined as significant inflation. Now, there are other sectors of the Alberta population that would really like to see their benefits – and I'm talking about individuals on SFI or AISH that don't see that sort of rate of inflation factored into their benefits. So I would ask that the hon. minister be a little bit more prudent in the future.

Now, line element 2.0.9, international marketing, Mr. Chairman,

on page 400, the \$28.1 million expenditure here. The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo talked a little bit about this. If we look back at the activity in Tourism, Parks and Recreation in the past, we will see that the department had two agreements with Travel Alberta International Inc., a not-for-profit corporation jointly owned by the Edmonton Economic Development Corporation and Tourism Calgary and the Calgary Convention & Visitors Bureau to carry out international tourism marketing on behalf of the department. Is any of the money in this pool of cash, \$28.1 million for international marketing, going to be spent by those organizations with those two agreements with your department?

Mrs. Ady: Yes.

Mr. MacDonald: How much?

Mrs. Ady: Hon. member, it's impossible to say because the partnerships are created as we go along. I can't give the hon. member a specific number, but yes, they will be spent.

Mr. MacDonald: So we're spending money, and we have no idea in the next year how we're going to spend it. Okay.

Now, tourism marketing. I look at the annual report from last year. There was an overexpenditure of \$790,000 in 2006-07. Can the minister guarantee the taxpayers of this province that there won't be an overexpenditure this year in tourism marketing?

Mrs. Ady: Hon. member, we're talking about estimates, not the annual report. I think that's a bit of the confusion that we're having.

Mr. MacDonald: No, hon. minister. There's no confusion here. I'm asking if you are going to make an allocation of \$28.1 million. I'm stating the fact from the annual report last year that there was an overexpenditure in tourism marketing of \$790,000. Can the minister guarantee that there will be no overexpenditure in that amount this year?

Mrs. Ady: The ministry did not overspend. Sometimes we reallocate based on redirected priorities.

Mr. MacDonald: Okay. Well, I'm just looking, for the record, Mr. Chairman, at page 111 of the annual report from last year for the department of tourism, parks, recreation and culture, and under the line item Tourism Marketing, Operating Expense and Equipment/Inventory Purchases there was, to note, an overexpenditure there.

Now, Mr. Chairman, I would like to move on, if you don't mind, please, to the fiscal plan, page 44. In the fiscal plan on page 44 we see where there are other initiatives under tourism.

In 2008-09, operating funding for tourism related initiatives will increase by almost \$10 million, or 17.5%, to over \$66 million. Over three years, about \$211 million has been allocated for these initiatives, as the province continues to work to raise awareness of Alberta as a tourism destination and strengthen efforts to facilitate the development of marketable tourism products and new travel destinations.

4:50

Well, I certainly hope that that money is well spent. I would certainly agree with the minister that in a lot of ways this province and its natural beauty sells itself, but at some point in the future I think tourism will be a very significant industry in this province if we don't destroy the environment in the meantime with our frantic pace of resource development.

Now, also on that page, Mr. Chairman, is the item for recreation and sport.

Through the Alberta Sport, Recreation, Parks and Wildlife Foundation, \$1.5 million in 2008-09, and \$4.5 million over three years will be provided for a new High Performance Athlete Assistance program that will supplement federal assistance to these athletes.

Is this program dedicated to both summer and winter Olympic sports?

Mrs. Ady: Thank you, hon. member. First, the questions I think were surrounding the \$10 million increase in the tourism levy. That additional money comes from the tourism levy itself, and we did have an increase this year to \$67.2 million. I want the hon. member to know that we do think we are spending this money appropriately in the promotion of this province. It's also a good indicator that tourism is increasing. Any time we see more rooms being used, we know that there are more tourists in this province, whether they're business or recreational, however they are. So that is where the \$10 million increase came from.

I would agree with the hon. member that this is a green industry. It's renewable. You know, we always talk about what's nonrenewable, what's renewable. For sure, tourism is a really green industry. It is renewable, and we think it brings an awful lot of value to this province. We've got a \$5 billion industry, as I said before, that we're trying to grow, 111,000 people working in this industry. If I was to go into the town of Banff today, they would tell me it's their only industry and how important that is to them. We think this levy is working very well. It's rising every year, and it's a good indication of what's going on there.

As far as Podium Alberta, it's not just for elite athletes; it's also for Paralympic athletes. All I can tell you about this program is that it is for both summer and winter. They must be carded. It brings them about \$6,000 a year above and beyond the \$18,000 a year that they get from the federal government. They have to be a resident of Alberta, and again their national sports organization has to card them. It is not limited just to winter sports. It's also there for summer sports and for our Paralympic athletes as well.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. To the hon. minister. Now, this program is for sports for summer and winter Olympics. Will this athletic assistance program be equally shared between male and female athletes? If we look at the outstanding record of our female speed skating team, oddly enough many of the members come this time from Manitoba. Will there be a mechanism to distribute this money equally and fairly between all athletes? I certainly hope it doesn't wind up with the hockey clubs.

Mrs. Ady: I take the hon. member's point. First of all, let me just say that it is for high-performance athletes, not just Olympic athletes. Obviously, our athletes are competing in more than just the Olympics out there at a high level, so it's high-performance athletes. It doesn't distinguish between male and female. If they are carded by their national organization, they are eligible.

I even have here a great list of those athletes in the different sports. I see some seven athletes that are carded in men's volleyball. I see five women volleyball players carded that would qualify. When it comes to water polo, I see four on the men's side, three on the women's. In waterskiing I see an equal number. In whitewater canoe we've got three carded there. Men's wrestling: that's a great story. There's one. We have one female wrestler, you'll be happy to know, that is carded that will qualify. In yachting we have two

women, and in Paralympic yachting we have Brenda Hopkins and Dan McCoy. So I really kind of see an equal spread. It doesn't distinguish between male and female. You have to be carded, you have to be high performance, and then you qualify for this program.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would like to note at this time the significant achievements of our female athletes at the last Winter Olympics, and let's make sure that our female athletes, the ones that qualify from this province, get a fair and equitable amount of support for their efforts.

Now, on page 84 of the fiscal plan we note that from the allocation of lottery fund revenue there is \$50 million set aside for support for the capital region river valley park. Could the minister please explain the time frames on this allocation, when and where this money will be spent?

Thank you.

Mrs. Ady: Well, I'm not surprised the hon. member is curious about this because it's such a great announcement. I mean, I know that this particular park, which will have a third of the province have access to it, someday is going to be fabulous.

First of all, I want to say that the goal of my ministry is to support and encourage the growth of parks in Alberta, and this is a great example of one that I think will improve quality of life. The proposed capital region valley park is the product of a lot of hard work and collaboration between seven municipalities, and we're proud to be able to give them this \$50 million to get them launched into the dream and the vision that they have for it. Particularly as someone who, as I said before, has spent so much time in Fish Creek park in Calgary, that urban park has been such a blessing in our lives. I think of the many, many hours my family and I have been down there and the over 3 million people a year that access it. I believe that's what we're going to see in the future for this particular park. Again, as I said, it'll benefit nearly a third of our population.

As to where the money is going, there is a partnership that is put together right now that is discussing how and what the next steps for this park will be. It's early days. We've just said that there's \$50 million available for this partnership to begin its work: their fundraising efforts, their acquisitions, what they want to do, and the scope and the vision of this park. I know it's been in the plans for some 12 years, I think, that these groups have been at work. It's just a little early. We've just made this announcement. No, I can't give the hon. member specifics yet as to where the money will go, but we'll be happy to report that, you know, in the future. At this point in time it's just to help this park get off the ground and to begin to realize its dream.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I don't know how much time I have, but in case I run out, I would like to express my gratitude to the hon. minister for her answers.

Now, on page 130 of the fiscal plan, under Economic Outlook, the Canadian dollar is to remain strong, and in the forecast assumptions here basically it would be safe to say that it's going to be at or near par with the American dollar. This fund of yours . . . [Mr. MacDonald's speaking time expired]

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

Mr. Rodney: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I know we only have till 5:28. I don't know if I'll be able to utilize all 28 minutes.

I understand there are a couple of other members who would like to speak, but I have at least four categories I would like to ask the minister questions on.

I know that Bill 2 is before the House, so we will not be discussing that, as much as I ache to as a member in the past of the STMC. I'll concentrate instead on four things. I'll list them now: tourism levy, Fish Creek park, new river parks for Edmonton and Calgary, and a little bit more on Olympic facilities and athletes. We can ask and go back and forth one at a time if that pleases the chair.

To the first one, the tourism levy. There are a lot of good ministers, elected officials, those who work with and for us, and everyday Albertans who had a whole lot of input on the change from 5 to 4 per cent in directing funds into the remarketing of our fine province in our province, across our country, and around the world.

5:00

There have been some changes that have been made to that by certain municipalities, keeping it at 5 per cent and even adding to it. I just wonder if the minister could give us an update. What are the pros and cons? How has the reaction been from everyday Albertans and from those who collect the tourism levy? In general, has this been a mistake or has this been a great thing for the collection of funds, the use of funds, and the reinvestment of funds? Has it been a good return on investment? Would you make further recommendations?

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Ady: Thank you. I think it's a good question, Mr. Chairman. The levy has finally brought consistent funding to this industry. They finally are able to plan for the future, to be able to really take the vision of where they want to take tourism for this province and advance it. As was said earlier, we have a bill on the floor of this House that we think will further strengthen the governance of that. But let me just say this: Travel Alberta has been doing a very good job of marketing this province in this province and outside this province, but this stable funding that we now have by moving this to a tourism levy that's dedicated to the promotion of this province has made a significant difference in where they're going to be able to go in the future. So I would say to you that in my conversations with industry, they've wanted this for a long time. They're very, very pleased that that has become a reality and that they are now able to look forward to stable funding.

We've also seen this funding go up. We saw it go up by about 14 to 17 per cent this year alone. It went up to \$67.2 million from \$57 million, and for us that's an indication, Mr. Chairman, that tourism promotion is working because more people are coming, more people are staying, and more people are paying the levy. So it's a really good thermometer, if you will, to tell us if tourism is actually improving and our marketing plan is working. So, yes, I think the industry is very happy, and they very much look forward to the continuation of the work we do around governance because they now have stable funding.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Rodney: Thanks, Chair. On to topic 2, Fish Creek park, which has been alluded to by a number of members. I would encourage all members to join the hon. minister and myself and others who frequent the park to enjoy what I think is the gem of Calgary-Lougheed. It takes up the lion's share of that constituency and I am very, very proud of that. I'm very, very proud of a couple of people who have made it their life's work to make sure this is one of the

it was of some surprise and perhaps just a little bit of shock that I heard remarks that things were out of order down there, especially after repairs were on time and on budget after what was a very natural turn of events with the flooding some time ago.

I just wonder if the hon. minister might bring things up to date. I mean, there were some great ministers and people who work for parks and with parks that made sure that money was well spent. Perhaps you'd like to delineate how that money was spent, if they were all the same trails that were renewed, if they were different ones, different kinds of materials, if they were the replacement of all the bridges or only some of the bridges.

My understanding is that there are people from all over the world – and I do mean that because I have met some of these people – who come to Fish Creek park to find out how they recreated that park in the most natural way possible. Is this not something we should be extremely proud of?

Mrs. Ady: Well, Mr. Chairman, obviously, I've been on my feet several times today talking about Fish Creek park, and I want you to know that I think that the product down there is fabulous. Again, we had some issues earlier that we will look into, but there has been a whole bunch of redevelopment. For those of you that aren't aware, there was a flood that came through Fish Creek park and took down all the bridges and destroyed a lot of the pathways – and I know of the devastation that happened in this flood because I go down there every morning – so some \$600,000 was spent down in Fish Creek.

No, we did not renew all the bridges. There were some bridges in there that would not have withstood another flood. So they were very careful when they renewed bridges this time. They built them to a standard that if there was another flood, they would survive. There were a lot of smaller bridges back on the west end, near the hon. member's constituency – now, he thinks it's part of Calgary-Lougheed. I'd wrestle him for that. I think it's part of Calgary-Shaw. I'm sure the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek would wrestle with both of us. But it sits within our constituencies.

Yes, we have renewed those bridges and pathways. I was just down there last week, and I remember there was a time when you couldn't get through certain areas of Fish Creek park. Those pathways have all been repaired to a higher quality. I was listening to one constituent of mine that rides his bike down in those parkway systems. He says that it's so fabulous the way they've resurfaced them now. They were pretty rough before, and now they're all upgraded and, of course, of a higher standard.

I spoke wrong. It was \$600,000, actually, that was spent on Sikome Lake. That is a change, one that you're going to be hearing me talk about out there. We have now decided that we're going to fence Sikome Lake. For those of you that don't know, it's a man-made lake, and in the summer months when the weather gets really hot, people in the city of Calgary come there in just huge numbers. We'll have up to 20,000 people down at Sikome Lake on any given day. I can hear them from my house because they're down the hill. The noise is incredible out of Sikome Lake. When it's hot, up to 20,000 people come. So we have decided to fence the lake. It does not mean that we'll be charging to go to Sikome Lake. As you know, we don't charge in provincial parks. But it is a way for us to manage the numbers because sometimes the numbers become very dangerous.

Another change for Sikome Lake is that we'll be changing the hours. We'll actually be closing the park at 6:30. Mr. Chairman, that's being caused by that critical shortage in all industries when it comes to hiring help. We're doing some things different this year. We will not have lifeguards posted at Sikome Lake this year. We'll have beach patrols who will be there in case there are accidents, to help, you know, in the rescue. But we are warning all parents and

people that come to Sikome Lake that they're going to have to be on guard. They're going to have to watch their own children. They cannot depend on somebody else watching them. Much like the lakes that sit within my constituency, that's always been the rule, but now we have a way to manage the numbers that get down there. There is some help, but we really only have enough help to manage one shift, and that's why we'll be closing it at 6:30 this year. Again, it's still not going to be charged.

We felt also that the fence was important, too, for safety issues. As you know, when you get a lot of bodies in water, sometimes the bacteria levels can get pretty high, and in the past we've had to close Sikome Lake in order to clean it. Sometimes they treat the lake, and there's great danger in having an open body of water that you're treating that's not fenced. So we do think it will provide more safety.

As well we have that odd late-night skinny dipper that still makes their way into the park. We're not sure that the fence will deter them but maybe slow them down.

Sikome Lake is again open for business. It's a wonderful facility in Calgary and one that many Calgarians use on a regular basis in the hot summer months.

Fish Creek park itself is renewed. As far as I'm concerned, it's beautiful. I'm uncertain about the grasslands. I spend every morning in there. I think the new pathway systems are fabulous. I've been very impressed with the Friends of Fish Creek, who worked extensively with our park staff in order to decide what should come back, what should be there. I can tell you that over 3 million visitors a year enjoy that park, and it is by far one of the largest urban parks in this country and one that is definitely something that creates a great lifestyle for Calgarians.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Chair. I do hesitate in referring to Fish Creek park publicly often because I'm afraid that if too many people find out about it, things will change. But I appreciate it. The people who work in parks and with the Friends of Fish Creek would say that it's world class. I appreciate the update, not only in my part of the world, our constituency with Fish Creek park, but also a little further down at Sikome Lake.

On to the next one, keeping with watersheds. There's been a whole lot of talk about what is going to happen in Edmonton and in Calgary when it comes to the rivers and the parks to come. A lot of people have done a lot of great work on this. It's an exciting opportunity, but a lot of Albertans really aren't aware of how wonderful this is. I wonder if the minister might explain how some of this money is going to be spent and exactly what the nature of the activities will be. Perhaps we can take some of the concern from conservationists who believe that this will change everything for the worse. What exactly is going to happen in the Edmonton and Calgary river basin areas with these new parks?

5:10

Mrs. Ady: Well, Mr. Chairman, I actually think this is a step in the right direction, particularly as we look at this River Valley Alliance; I mean, to get seven, you know, municipalities to work together to create something like this. I think that some day people are going to look back and say: thank goodness for the vision that allowed these groups to get together; thank goodness for the vision of our Premier for actually understanding that vision and creating the opportunity for this park to be created. No, I don't think these municipalities are going to come in and destroy the river valley. I think they're going to preserve it. I think they're going to create balanced access and

going to come in and destroy the river valley. I think they're going to preserve it. I think they're going to create balanced access and opportunities down there and that it's a far better solution than having it broken up piecemeal or a lot of different organizations or groups at work. I'm excited about this.

I think that when we look back in 10 years at what they create down there, it's going to be a gem. I think we're going to be very proud of it, much like we are of Fish Creek and the new Harvie lands that are going up into the north of Calgary. I think that kind of stuff takes real vision. It's hard to achieve. It's hard to get that kind of co-operation. I fundamentally believe that it blesses the lives of our urban dwellers that don't, as our rural colleagues, live with lots of space around their houses. We're wedged pretty tight in the city these days. Our footprint gets narrower and narrower. These urban parks become way more important to us. So I'm thrilled that the Premier of this province understood that and, actually, was the one that encouraged us to do this. I think that it's going to be a gem.

Mr. Rodney: The last question with the time we have so that others have a little bit of time as well is with respect to Olympic facilities and athletes. It's true that we spend a fair bit of money and other provinces don't. I wonder if the minister might comment on the fact that it's been suggested that Alberta pays as much for these sorts of things as the rest of the provinces combined, and it's more a federal responsibility. How accurate is this? Is this actually a good return on our investment? I've heard references of athletes from other provinces, including Manitoba and Saskatchewan – I know these people personally – who end up staying here, and they become ambassadors for our province. I think it's a huge return on our investment. Is it not true that these facilities help the weekend warrior, the everyday person, the youth, the adult, the senior citizen, that these facilities, in the end, are for everyone, not simply catering to elite as some might suggest? Could you set the record straight on how it helps all of us?

The Deputy Chair: The hon minister.

Mrs. Ady: Well, thank you. I think that's a great question. We were talking earlier about: what is a hook? What draws people? What brings people here? Yes, we have reinvested in our Olympic facilities. In 1988 we hosted the Olympics here. It was a great event. But those facilities were showing their age. If we wanted to continue to attract high-performance athletes to train here and stay here, they needed to be brought back up to a standard. Some of them were not safe anymore. I think of the top of Nakiska, where we had the women up there training. They're faster. All things considered, they needed some new consideration up there in order to continue to train here.

We've always said that the road to the Olympics will travel through Alberta, but when the Olympics are over, it's going to return to Alberta. That gives us a great opportunity in this province. Every time we have a World Cup event – and again I refer to that Canmore event that happened cross-countrywise. I mean, that was the most beautiful day you can imagine: clear, beautiful. I don't remember how many viewers we had that day, but some 800 million people were looking at the landscape of Alberta that day. There are a lot of countries that would like to get 800 million people looking at their product. So we're fortunate in the fact that we are home to some of the best Olympic facilities in the world.

When I look at our Olympic Oval, we're still considered to be one of the best in the world. We have Nakiska. We've got the \$20 million we just gave this year to rehab some of our Olympic

facilities. We just did a refurbishment of the ski jumping facilities to training standards. We have a new half-pipe facility to full international standards. We have a new freestyle aerial and mogul facility to full international standards. We have a new alpine slalom facility to full international standards. We have a major expansion of the Bill Warren Training Centre in Canmore, as I said before. We have Camp Green on Farnham Glacier, which is a summer alpine training facility.

Mr. Chairman, these facilities keep the athletes here, train the next generation, and give us the best exposure, I think, that money can buy. I would agree with the hon. member that, yes, other provinces perhaps don't invest and haven't had Olympics. We've had them here. We have the facility. We have the critical mass. We should and we have and we will continue to showcase this province through this winter sport facility.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Rodney: We only have a short amount of time. There are so many other questions to be asked. Let's give the others a chance.

The Deputy Chair: I'd like to recognize the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I very much appreciate that, hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed. That's very thoughtful of you.

Speaking of thoughtfulness, I'll just take a moment to throw a bouquet the way of the Education minister. I was very pleased with the rapidity with which he answered questions that I'd asked. I would ask for the same kind of response from the minister because I don't think she'll have a chance to answer these questions.

I won't get into detail. I'll save it for Committee of the Whole on Bill 2, the tourism act. But for the members of the ministry: there is a concern that has been expressed that by contracting out this service to a particular professional group, local tourism agencies are going to possibly be put out of business or not have their connections. Hopefully, this has been taken into account.

My personal experience with Travel Alberta has been a positive one in terms of the information that was provided on park facilities' opening times and so on. Hopefully, the local natures that have previously taken place won't be lost.

Again, I'm coming back to the multi-use. You cannot do certain things in the same area. For example, you can't have quads and horses, can't hike and quad in the same area. That's not to say that any of those activities in their unique way are not legitimate. What has happened is that from attempts to make a park a multi-use facility – I'm referring to Ghost-Waiparous, which is more of a wilderness area than a strictly enforced designated park – so much destruction has taken place in that park by very select users. Yet because of the lack of concern for our natural resources, our water areas – I'm talking about that at one point there was even a tank going across the river crossings. I think the minister may have mentioned this. I can understand the fun of quads. I have trouble with the mud buggies slugging through rivers and streams, and the thought of a tank I find just unbelievable.

What happened because of some of these extreme usages: the whole Ghost-Waiparous area, with the exception of I think it was about six miles of roadways, was closed, and people who were going in to climb the ice faces and so on were prevented from accessing the areas. So I would just say: don't let the misuse of one group affect the enjoyment of the others. When activities such as mountain biking, hiking can co-exist, consider that possibility. For example,

quads and off-road vehicles because that's a designated park. Instead of having the multi-use, we need to have those designations to validate that those are recreational activities, whether that's something we would pursue or not.

Now, I want to mention a name. Biologist Dr. Brian Horejsi is a big proponent of off-road parks. As part of the mix of the parks it would be wonderful to encourage more opportunities for off-road parks; in other words, no entry into it other than by horse or potentially by hike or by mountain bike. So there just wouldn't be access roads in there. If you wanted to go in there, you'd have a wilderness experience. You'd hike in. You'd bike in. You'd horse in. I would really like to expand the idea of off-road parks.

5:20

The idea that when an area no longer has a producing well in it and it's become an orphaned well or at least it has been capped, the idea of putting the company responsible for sort of cutting up the road and returning it to a more natural state kind of thing would be something to consider. This would help with the off-road parks. It would also help with the reclamation of the land. It would prevent abuse of the backwoods areas because the access would be only by foot or by horse and so on.

Management plans. Right now – and this is something that the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society pointed out – while we have 500-plus parks, only 45 of them have management plans. I know some of them are really tiny, little areas, but we could at least have sort of generic management plans for, say, picnic site areas and then more detailed for camping and multi-use areas. We can't preserve what we don't protect. That's the idea behind there.

Increasing access to parks. William Watson Lodge, for example, in Peter Lougheed park is one of the few parks that is wheelchair accessible in a large way. I know that my former colleague and friend Weslyn Mather – her dad and sisters are down in Calgary, and she's really enjoyed the William Watson Lodge. It would be wonderful if there were more accessible parks for people who are confined to wheelchairs. Now, it was mentioned to me that there is a northern park. I believe it's Blue Lake. It's towards Jasper. There was some discussion about making that a wheelchair accessible park because there are very few accessible parks that I'm aware of in the northern part of the province. This would be something that I would really encourage you to look at.

Fees. I ran the Cataract Creek park with my wife for three years. The price for seniors was \$15. The price for basically everybody else was \$17 per tent or per trailer, whatever it was that people lived in, but the only facilities they had were the old-fashioned outhouses, and they had pumps. We inspected the pumps. We took them to the lab at the Foothills and so on. They were charged the same amount for very little facility as other parks that had the lights, that had the power, that had the flush toilets and so on.

Seniors get a bit of a break. As I said, they got \$2 off, but what about youth groups: YMCA, biking tour kids, Scouts, and so on? Could we consider a reduced price in a special circumstance for them? I mean, we had as park operators a degree of flexibility, and

I know High Country Camping was very supportive of the youth groups and gave them financial breaks. If we could put that into the rules and as part of the registration. People who are riding in on bicycles: we get a lot of European tourists who enjoy the biking experience. Why should they potentially pay the same fee for their bicycle and a one-man tent as a person who has a large RV unit or a family, you know, with three small tents? Just some different usages. If there's less effect on the land, maybe we should have a differentiated rate.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, you're near the 10-minute mark. Do you wish the hon. minister to respond?

Mr. Chase: I indicated that written responses would be wonderful. I realize that there's not sufficient time to respond.

I just have two more points to make. That's the idea of getting a double bang for your buck, and that's using watershed protection and provincial parks. I talked last night about the Cochrane area. If we could expand and protect the Bragg Creek area, which is the watershed for Calgary, both for the Elbow and the Bow, we could have both our water protected and a park designation, so I would ask you to consider that double bang for your buck.

Lastly, again, the double-bang theory: the Nature Conservancy; Larry Simpson; the last five miles, that I mentioned last night; the fescue grasslands closest to the American border. If the government could . . .

The Deputy Chair: We're very near the very end. The hon. minister has two minutes left to respond, and the session is over.

Mr. Chase: Okay. If I could just say: if the government could with the Nature Conservancy plan so that you could have side-by-side land that is now protected, that would be wonderful.

Thank you.

Mrs. Ady: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. I just want to thank the Assembly for the opportunity to present our estimates today. I think we've had a really good discussion, a lot of great questions. I can tell how much people care about the things that exist within my ministry by the amount of interest that was shown today. I want you to know that my staff and I are really committed to preserving and creating access in parks, to growing the tourism industry, and to ensuring that this province is, as we've always said, the best place to work, live, and – what was the final one? [interjections] Invest. Well, all kinds of suggestions coming.

Again, I want to thank the Assembly for this opportunity.

The Deputy Chair: The time allotted for consideration has passed, and I'd like all the staff to leave the Assembly, please.

Mr. Hancock: I move that the committee adjourn until 7:30 p.m.

[Motion carried; the committee adjourned at 5:28 p.m.]

Table of Contents

Wednesday afternoon, May 7, 2008

Introduction of Visitors	521
Introduction of Guests	521, 531
Members' Statements	
Random Dog Searches	523
Esquao Awards for Aboriginal Women	531
Mental Health Week	532
David Thompson Brigade	532
Emergency Preparedness Week	532
Events in Wetaskiwin-Camrose Constituency	533
Oral Question Period	
Reclamation of Oil Sands Tailings Ponds	523
Environmental Protection Security Fund	523
Security of Oil Sands Tailings Ponds	524
Métis Settlements Funding	524
Tobacco Reduction	525
Queen Elizabeth II Highway Repairs	525
Calgary Health Region Funding	526
Camping in Parks and Protected Areas	526
Traffic Noise on Anthony Henday Drive	526
Funding for Contracted CFSA Agencies	527
Random Dog Searches	527
Funding for Nonprofit Agencies	528
Alexander Rutherford Scholarships	528
Children and Youth Services Caseworkers	529
Homelessness Initiatives	529, 531
CART Services in the Legislative Assembly	530
Family Violence	530
Presenting Petitions	533
Introduction of Bills	
Bill 13 Financial Institutions Statutes Amendment Act, 2008	533
Tabling Returns and Reports	533
Tablings to the Clerk	534
Committee of Supply	
Main Estimates 2008-09	
Tourism, Parks and Recreation	534

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